

THE
SYSTEM OF NATURE.

PART THE SECOND.

VOL. THE FOURTH.

THE
SYSTEM OF NATURE;
OR,
THE LAWS
OF THE
MORAL AND PHYSICAL WORLD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
M. MIRABAUD,
ONE OF THE FORTY MEMBERS OF, AND PERPETUAL SECRETARY
TO, THE FRENCH ACADEMY,

By WILLIAM HODGSON,

AUTHOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF REASON,
NOW CONFINED IN NEWGATE FOR SEDITION, UNDER A SEN-
TENCE OF TWO YEARS' IMPRISONMENT A FINE OF TWO HUN-
DRED POUNDS AND SECURITIES FOR TWO YEARS MORE IN
FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS.

"Nature rerum vis atque majestas in omnibus momentis fide
" caret, si quis modo partes ejus, ac non totam complectatur
" animo." PLIN. HIST. NATUR. LIB. VII.

PART THE SECOND.

VOL. THE FOURTH.

LONDON:

Printed for, and sold by the TRANSLATOR; and may be had of
H. D. Symonds, No 20, Paternoster-Row; D. HOLT, Newark;
and all the BOOKSELLERS.

M,DCC,XCVI.



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EXAMINATION OF THE ADVANTAGES
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THEIR INFLUENCE UPON MORALS,
UPON POLITICS, UPON THE SCIENCES,
UPON THE HAPPINESS OF NATIONS
AND INDIVIDUALS.

WE have hitherto seen the slender foundation of those ideas which men form to themselves of the divinity; the little solidity there is in the proofs by which they support his existence; the want of harmony in those opinions which they have formed to themselves of this being, equally impossible to be known by all the inhabitants of the earth: we have discovered the incompatibility of those attributes which theology

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assigns

assigns to him: we have proved that this being, of which the name alone has the faculty of inspiring fear, is nothing but the shapeless fruit of ignorance, of an alarmed imagination, of enthusiasm, of melancholy: we have shewn that the notions which men have formed to themselves of him, only date their origin from the prejudices of their infancy, transmitted by education, strengthened by habit, nourished by fear, maintained and perpetuated by authority. In short, every thing must have convinced us, that the idea of God, so generally diffused over the earth, is no more than an universal error of the human species. It remains now, then, to examine if this error be useful.

No error can be advantageous to the human species; it never is founded but upon his ignorance, or the blindness of his mind. The more importance men shall attach to their prejudices, the more fatal consequences will their errors produce for them. Thus, BACON had reason for saying that *the worst of all things, is deified error*. Indeed, the inconveniences that result from our religious errors, have been, and always will be the
most

most terrible and the most extensive. The more we respect these errors, the more play they give to our passions, the more they disturb our mind, the more irrational they render us, the more influence they have on the whole conduct of our life. There is but little likelihood that he who renounces his reason in the thing which he considers as the most essential to his happiness, will listen to it on any other occasion.

If we reflect a little, we shall find the most convincing proof of this sad truth; we shall see in those fatal notions which men have cherished of the divinity, the true source of those prejudices and of those sorrows of every kind of which they are the victims. Nevertheless, as we have elsewhere said, utility ought to be the only rule and the uniform standard of those judgments which are formed on the opinions, the institutions, the systems, and the actions of intelligent beings; it is according to the happiness which these things procure for us, that we ought to attach to them our esteem; whenever they are useless to us, we ought to despise them; as soon as they become pernicious to

us, we ought to reject them ; and reason prescribes that we should detest them in proportion to the magnitude of the evils which they cause us.

After these principles, founded on our nature, and which will appear incontestable to every reasonable being, let us coolly examine the effects which the notions of the divinity have produced on the earth. We have already given a glimpse, in more than one part of this Work, that morals, which have only for object, that man should be disposed to preserve himself and live in society, had nothing in common with those imaginary systems which he can form to himself upon a power distinguished from nature ; we have proved, that it sufficed to meditate the essence of a sensible, intelligent, and rational being, to find motives to moderate his passions, to resist his vicious propensities, to make him fly criminal habits, to render himself useful and dear to those beings for whom he hath a continual occasion. These motives are, without doubt, more true, more real, more powerful, than those which it is believed ought to be borrowed from an imaginary being,

being, calculated to be seen diversely by all those who shall meditate upon him. We have caused it to be felt, that education, in making us, at an early period, contract good habits, favourable dispositions, strengthened by the laws, by a respect for public opinion, by the ideas of decency, by the desire of meriting the esteem of others, by the fear of losing our own esteem, would be sufficient to accustom us to a laudable conduct, and to divert us even from those secret crimes for which we shall be obliged to punish ourselves by fear, shame, and remorse. Experience proves to us, that the success of a first secret crime disposes us to commit a second, and this a third; that the first action is the commencement of an habit; that there is much less distance from the first crime to the hundredth, than from innocence to criminality; that a man who permits himself to commit a series of bad actions in the assurance of impunity deceives himself, seeing that he is always obliged to punish himself, and that, moreover, he cannot know where he shall stop. We have shewn that those punishments which, for its interest, society has the
right

right to inflict on all those who disturb it, are, for those men who are insensible to the charms of virtue, or the advantages which result from the practice of it, more real, more efficacious, and more immediate obstacles, than the pretended wrath or the distant punishments of an invisible power, of whom the idea is effaced every time that impunity in this world is believed to be certain. In short, it is easy to feel, that politics, founded upon the nature of man and of society, armed with equitable laws, vigilant with regard to the morals of men, faithful in rewarding virtue and punishing crime, would be more suitable to render morality respectable and sacred than the chimerical authority of that God who is adored by all the world, and who never restrains any but those who are already sufficiently restrained by a moderate temperament, and by virtuous principles.

On the other hand, we have proved that nothing was more absurd and more dangerous than attributing human qualities to the divinity, which, in fact, find themselves in continual contradiction; a goodness, a wisdom

wisdom, an equity, that we see, every instant, counterbalanced or denied by wickedness, by confusion, by an unjust despotism, which all the theologians of the world have at all times attributed to this same divinity. It is, then, very easy to conclude from it that God, who is shewn to us under such different aspects, cannot be the model of men's conduct, and that his moral character cannot serve for an example to beings living together in society, who are only reputed virtuous when their conduct does not deviate from that benevolence and justice which they owe to their fellow-creatures. A god superior to every thing, who oweth nothing to his subjects, who hath occasion for no one, cannot be the model of his creatures, who are full of wants, and, consequently, must have duties.

PLATO has said, that *virtue consisted in resembling God*. But where shall we find this god whom man ought to resemble? Is it in nature? Alas! he who is supposed to be the mover of it, diffuses indifferently over the human race, great evils and great benefits; he is frequently unjust to the purest souls;

souls; he accords the greatest favours to the most perverse mortals; and if, as we are assured, he must shew himself one day more equitable, we shall be obliged to wait for that time to regulate our conduct upon that which he shall hold.

Shall it be in the revealed religions, that we shall draw up our ideas of virtue? Alas! do they not all appear to be in accord in announcing to us a despotic, jealous, vindictive, interested god, who knows no law, who follows his caprice in every thing, who loves or who hates, who chooses or re-proves, according to his whim; who acts irrationally, who delights in carnage, rapine, and crimes; who plays with his feeble subjects, who overloads them with puerile laws, who lays continual snares for them, who rigorously prohibits them from consulting their reason? What would become of morality, if men proposed to themselves such gods for models?

It is, however, some divinity of this temper that all nations adore. Thus, we see it is in consequence of these principles, that religion, in all countries, far from being

1

favourable

favourable to morality, shakes it and annihilates it. It divides men in the room of uniting them; in the place of loving each other and lending mutual succours one to the other, they dispute with each other, they despise each other, they hate each other, they persecute each other, and they frequently cut each others' throats for opinions equally irrational: the slightest difference in their religious notions, renders them from that moment enemies, separates their interests, sets them into continual quarrels. For theological conjectures nations become opposed to other nations; the sovereign arms himself against his subjects; citizens wage war against their fellow citizens; fathers detest their children, these plunge the sword into the bosom of their parents; husbands and wives are disunited; relations forget each other; all the social bonds are broken; society rends itself in pieces by its own hands, whilst, in the midst of this horrid confusion, each pretends that he conforms to the views of the god whom he serves, and does not reproach himself with any one of

those crimes which he commits in the support of his cause.

We again find the same spirit of whim and madness in the rites, the ceremonies, the practices, which all the worships in the world appear to have placed so much above the social or natural virtues. Here mothers deliver up their children to feed their god ; there subjects assemble themselves in the ceremony of consoling their god for those pretended outrages which they have committed against him, by immolating to him human victims. In another country, to appease the wrath of his god, a frantic madman tears himself and condemns himself for life to rigorous tortures. The JEHOVAH of the JEWS is a suspicious tyrant, who breathes nothing but blood, murder, carnage, and who demands that they should nourish him with the vapours of animals. The JUPITER of the PAGANS is a lascivious monster. The MOLOCH of the PHENICIANS is a cannibal ; the pure mind of the CHRISTIANS resolved, in order to appease his fury, to crucify his own son ; the savage god of the

the MEXICAN cannot be satisfied but by thousands of mortals which are immolated to his sanguinary appetite.

Such are the models which the divinity presents to men in all the superstitions of the world. Is it, then, surprising that his name hath become the signal of terror, madness, cruelty, inhumanity for all nations, and serves as a continual pretext for the most shameful and impudent violation of the duties of morality? It is the frightful character that men every where give of their god, that banishes goodness for ever from their hearts, morality from their conduct, felicity and reason from their habitations; it is every where a god who is disturbed by the mode in which unhappy mortals think, that arms them with poniards one against the other, that makes them stifle the cries of nature, that renders them barbarous to themselves and atrocious to their fellow creatures; in short, they become irrational and furious every time that they are disposed to imitate the god whom they adore, to merit his love and to serve him with zeal.

It is not, then, in heaven that we ought to seek either for models of virtue, or the rules of conduct necessary to live in society. Man needs human morality, founded upon the nature of man, upon invariable experience, upon reason: the morality of the gods will always be prejudicial to the earth; cruel gods cannot be well served, but by subjects who resemble them. What becomes, then, of those great advantages which have been imagined to result from the notions which are unceasingly given us of the divinity? We see that all nations acknowledge a god, who is sovereignly wicked; and to conform themselves to his views, they trample under feet the most evident duties of humanity; they appear to act as if it were only by crimes and madness that they hoped to draw down upon themselves the favours of the sovereign intelligence, of whose goodness they boast so much. As soon as there is a question of religion, that is to say, of a chimera, whose obscurity has made them place him above either reason or virtue, men make it a duty with themselves to give loose to all their passions;

passions ; they mistake the clearest precepts of morality, as soon as their priests give them to understand that the divinity commands them to commit crimes, or that it is by transgressions that they will be able to obtain pardon for their faults.

Indeed, it is not in these revered men, diffused over the whole earth, to announce to men the oracles of heaven, that we shall find real virtues. These enlightened men, who call themselves the ministers of the Most High, frequently preach nothing but hatred, discord, and fury, in his name : the divinity, far from having an useful influence over their own morals, commonly does no more than render them more ambitious, more covetous, more hardened, more obstinate, more proud. We see them unceasingly occupied in giving birth to animosities, by their unintelligible quarrels. We see them wrestling against the sovereign authority, which they pretend is submitted to their's. We see them arm the chiefs of a nation against their legitimate magistrates. We see them distribute to the credulous people, weapons to massacre each

each other with, in those futile disputes which the sacerdotal vanity makes to pass for matters of importance. These men, so persuaded of the existence of a god, and who menace the people with his eternal vengeance, do they avail themselves of these marvellous notions, to moderate their pride, their cupidity, their vindictive and turbulent humour? In those countries where their empire is established in the most solid manner, and where they enjoy impunity, are they then enemies to that debauchery, that intemperance, and those excesses, which a severe, god interdicts to his adorers? On the contrary, do we not see them from thence emboldened in crime, intrepid in iniquity, giving a free scope to their irregularities, to their vengeance, to their hatred, and suspicious cruelties? In short, it may be advanced, without fear, that those, who, in every part of the earth, announce a terrible god, and make men tremble under his yoke; that those men, who unceasingly meditate upon him, and who undertake to prove his existence to others, who decorate him with his pompous attributes, who declare themselves

felves his interpreters, who make all the duties of morality to depend upon him, are those whom this god the least contributes to render virtuous, humane, indulgent, and sociable. In considering their conduct, we should be tempted to believe that they are perfectly undeceived with respect to the idol whom they serve, and that no one is less the dupe of those menaces which they pronounce in his name, than themselves. In the hands of the priests of all countries, the divinity resembles the head of MEDUSA, which, without injuring him who shewed it, petrified all the others. The priests are generally the most crafty of men, the best among them are truly wicked.

Does the idea of an avenging and remunerating god impose more upon those princes, on those gods of the earth, who found their power and the titles of their grandeur upon the divinity himself; who avail themselves of his terrific name to intimidate, and make those people hold them in reverence who are so frequently rendered unhappy by their caprice? Alas! the theological and supernatural ideas, adopted by the pride of sovereigns,

ver reigns, have done no more than corrupt politics, and have changed them into tyranny. The ministers of the Most High, always tyrants themselves, or the cherishers of tyrants, are they not unceasingly crying to monarchs, that they are the images of the Deity? Do they not tell the credulous people, that heaven is willing that they should groan under the most cruel and the most multifarious injustice; that to suffer, is their inheritance; that their princes, like the supreme being, have the indubitable right to dispose of the goods, the persons, the liberty, and the lives of their subjects? Do not these chiefs of nations, thus poisoned in the name of the divinity, imagine that every thing is permitted them? Competitors, representatives, and rivals of the celestial power, do they not exercise, after his example, the most arbitrary despotism? Do they not think, in the intoxication into which sacerdotal flattery has plunged them, that, like god, they are not accountable to men for their actions, that they owe nothing to the rest of mortals, that they are bound by no bonds to their miserable subjects?

It is, then, evident, that it is to theological notions, and to the loose flattery of the ministers of the divinity, that are to be ascribed the despotism, the tyranny, the corruption, and the licentiousness of princes, and the blindness of the people, to whom, in the name of heaven, they interdict the love of liberty; the labouring to their happiness; the opposing themselves to violence; the exercising their natural rights. These intoxicated princes, even in adoring an avenging god, and in obliging others to adore him, never cease a moment to outrage him by their irregularities and their crimes. Indeed, what morality is this, but that of men, who offer themselves as living images and representatives of the divinity? Are they, then, atheists, these monarchs who, habitually unjust, tear, without remorse, the bread from the hands of a famished people, to administer to the luxury of their insatiable courtiers, and the vile instruments of their iniquities? Are they atheists, those ambitious conquerors, who, but little contented with oppressing their own

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subjects, carry desolation, misfortune, and death, among the subjects of others? What do we see in those potentates, who reign by *divine right* over nations, except ambitious mortals, whom nothing can arrest, with hearts perfectly insensible to the sorrows of the human species; souls without energy, and without virtue, who neglect the most evident duties, in which even they do not deign to instruct themselves; powerful men, who insolently place themselves above the rules of natural equity*; knaves who make sport of honesty? In the

* The emperor CHARLES THE FIFTH used to say, that, *being a warrior, it was impossible for him to have either conscience or religion*: his general, the MARQUIS DE PESCAIRE, said, that *nothing was more difficult, than to serve at one and the same time the god MARS and JESUS CHRIST*. Generally speaking, nothing is more contrary to the spirit of CHRISTIANITY, than the profession of arms, and, nevertheless, the Christian princes have most numerous armies, and are perpetually at war. Moreover, the CLERGY would be extremely sorry that the maxims of the evangelists, or the Christian meekness, should be rigidly followed, which in no wise accords with their interests. This clergy have occasion for
soldiers,

the alliances which these deified sovereigns form betwixt themselves, do we even find the shadow of sincerity? In these princes, when even they are submitted, in the most abject manner, to superstition, do we meet with the smallest real virtue? We only see in them robbers, too haughty to be humane, too great to be just, who make for themselves alone a code of perfidies, violence, and treason; we only see in them wicked beings, ready to overreach, surprise, and injure each other; we only find in them furies, always at war, for the most futile interests, impoverishing their people, and wresting from each other the bloody remnants of nations; it might be said, that they dispute who shall make the greatest number of miserable beings on the earth! At length, wearied with their own fury, or forced by the hand of necessity to make peace, they attest the most insidious treaties in the name of God, ready to vio-

foldiers, to give solidity to their doctrines and their rights. This proves to us, to what a degree religion is calculated to impose on the passions of men

late their most solemn oaths, as soon as the smallest interest shall require it*.

Here is the manner, in which the idea of God imposes on those who call themselves his images, who pretend they have no account to render up of their actions but to him alone ! Amongst these representatives of the divinity, it is with difficulty we find, during thousands of years, one who has equity, sensibility, or the most ordinary talents and virtues. The people, brutalized by superstition, suffer infants, who are made giddy with flattery, to govern them with an iron sceptre, with which these imprudent beings do not feel that they wound themselves ; these mad men, transformed into gods, are the masters of the law, they decide for society, of whom the tongue is tied ; they have the power to create both the just and the unjust ; they exempt themselves from those rules which their caprice imposes on others, they neither know re-

* *Nihil est quod credere de se
Non possit, cum laudatur dei æqua potestas.*

JUVENAL SAT. IV. V. 70.

lations nor duties, they have never learned to fear, to blush, to feel remorse: their licentiousness hath no limits, because it is assured of remaining unpunished; in consequence, they disdain public opinion, decency, the judgments of men whom they are enabled to overwhelm, under the weight of their enormous power. We see them commonly given up to vice and debauchery, because the listlessness and the disgust which follows the surfeit of satiated passions, oblige them to recur to strange pleasures and costly follies to awaken activity in their benumbed souls. In short, accustomed only to fear God, they always conduct themselves, as if they had nothing to fear.

History, in all countries, shews us only a multitude of vicious and mischievous potentates; nevertheless it shews us but few, who may have been atheists. The annals of nations, on the contrary, offer to our view, a great number of superstitious princes, who passed their lives plunged in luxury and effeminacy, strangers to every virtue, uniformly good to their hungry courtiers and insensible of the sorrows of their subjects;

subjects ; governed by mistresses and unworthy favourites ; leagued with priests, against the public happiness ; in short, persecutors, who, to please their god, or expiate their shameful irregularities, joined to all their other crimes, that of tyrannizing over the thought, and of murdering citizens for their opinions. Superstition in princes, allies itself with the most horrid crimes ; almost all of them have religion, very few of them have a knowledge of true morality, or practise any useful virtue. Religious notions only serve to render them more blind and more wicked ; they believe themselves assured of the favour of heaven ; they think that their gods are appeased, if, for a little, they shew themselves attached to futile customs, and to the ridiculous duties which superstition imposes on them. NERO, the cruel NERO, his hands yet stained with the blood of his own mother, was desirous to be initiated into the mysteries of ELEUSIS. The odious CONSTANTINE found, in the Christian priests, accomplices disposed to expiate his crimes. That infamous PHILIP, whose cruel ambition

bition caused him to be called the DÆMON OF THE SOUTH, whilst he assassinated his wife and his son, piously caused the throats of the Batavians to be cut for religious opinions. It is thus that superstitious blindness persuades sovereigns that they can expiate crimes by crimes of still greater magnitude.

Let us conclude, then, from the conduct of so many princes, so very religious, but so little imbued with virtue, that the notions of the divinity, far from being useful to them, only served to corrupt them and to render them more wicked than nature had made them. Let us conclude, that the idea of an avenging god can never impose restraint on a deified tyrant, sufficiently powerful or sufficiently insensible not to fear the reproaches or the hatred of men; sufficiently hardened not to have compassion for the sorrows of the human species, from whom they believe themselves distinguished: neither heaven nor earth has any remedy for a being perverted to this degree; there is no curb capable of restraining his passions to which religion itself continually gives loose, and whom it renders more rash and inconsiderate.

siderate. Every time that they flatter themselves with easily expiating their crimes, they deliver themselves up with greater facility to crime. The most dissolute men are frequently extremely attached to religion; it furnishes them with means of compensating by customs that which they are deficient in morals; it is much easier to believe or to adopt doctrines and to conform themselves to ceremonies, than to renounce their habits or to resist their passions.

Under chiefs depraved even by religion, nations continued necessarily to be corrupted. The great conformed themselves to the vices of their masters; the example of these distinguished men, whom the uninformed believe to be happy, was followed by the people; COURTS became sinks, from whence issued continually the contagion of vice. The LAW, capricious and arbitrary, alone delineated honesty; JURISPRUDENCE was iniquitous and partial; JUSTICE had her bandage over her eyes only to the poor; the true ideas of EQUITY were effaced from all minds; EDUCATION, neglected, served only to produce ignorant and irrational beings

beings; devotees, always ready to injure themselves; RELIGION, sustained by tyranny, took place of every thing; it rendered those people blind and tractable whom the government proposed to despoil*.

Thus nations destitute of a rational administration of equitable laws, of useful instruction, of a reasonable education, and always continued by the monarch and the priest in ignorance and in chains, have become religious and corrupted. The nature of man, the true interests of society, the real advantage of the sovereign and of the people once mistaken, the morality of nature, founded upon the essence of man living in society, was equally unknown. It was forgotten that man has wants, that society was only formed that he might facilitate the means of satisfying them, that government ought to have for object the happiness and

* MACHIAVEL, in the 11, 12, and 13 CHAPTERS OF HIS POLITICAL DISCOURSES UPON TITUS LIVIUS, endeavours to shew the utility of which superstition was to the ROMAN REPUBLIC; but, unfortunately, the examples by which he supports it, proves, that none but the SENATE profited by the blindness of the people, and availed themselves of it, to keep them under their yoke.

maintenance of this society ; that it ought, consequently, to make use of motives suitable to have an influence over sensible beings. It was not seen that recompences and punishments form the powerful springs of which public authority could efficaciously avail itself to determine the citizens to blend their interests and to labour to their own felicity by labouring for that of the body of which they are members. The social virtues were unknown ; the love of our country became a chimera ; men, associated, had only an interest in injuring each other, and had no other care than that of meriting the favour of the sovereign, who believed himself interested in injuring all.

Here is the mode in which the human heart has become perverted ; here is the true source of moral evil, and of that hereditary, epidemical, and inveterate depravity, which we see reign over the whole earth. It is for the purpose of remedying so many evils, that recourse has been had to religion, which has itself produced them ; it has been imagined that the menaces of heaven would restrain those passions which every thing conspired to give birth to in all hearts ; men
foolishly

foolishly persuaded themselves that an ideal and metaphysical barrier, that terrible fables, that distant phantoms, would suffice to restrain their natural desires and impetuous propensities; they believed that invisible powers would be more efficacious than all the visible powers which evidently invite mortals to commit evil. They believed they had gained every thing in occupying their minds with dark and gloomy chimeras, with vague terrors, with an avenging divinity; and politics foolishly persuaded itself that it was for its own interests to submit the people blindly to the ministers of the divinity.

What resulted from this? Nations had only a sacerdotal and theological morality, accommodated to the views and to the variable interests of priests, who substituted opinions and reveries to truth; customs to virtue, a pious blindness to reason, fanaticism to sociability. By a necessary consequence of that confidence which the people accorded to the ministers of the divinity, two distinguished authorities were established in each state, who were continually at variance and at war with each other; the priest fought the

sovereign with the formidable weapon of opinion, it was generally sufficiently powerful to shake thrones*. The sovereign was never at rest but when abjectly devoted to his priests and tractable to their lessons, he lent his assistance to their phrenzy. These priests, always restless, ambitious, and intolerant, excited the sovereign to ravage his own states, they encouraged him in tyranny, they reconciled him to heaven when he feared to have outraged it. Thus, when two rival powers united themselves, morality gained nothing by the junction; the people were neither more happy, nor more virtuous; their morals, their wellbeing, their liberty were overwhelmed by the united forces of the God of

* It is well to observe, that the priests, who are perpetually crying out to the people, to submit themselves to their sovereigns, because their authority is derived from heaven, because they are the images of the divinity, presently change their language, whenever the sovereign does not blindly submit to them. The **CLERGY** upholds **DESPOTISM** only that it may direct its blows against its enemies, it overthrows it whenever it finds it contrary to its interests. The ministers of the invisible powers only preach up obedience to the visible powers, when these are humbly devoted to them.

heaven,

heaven, and the god of the earth. Princes, always interested in the maintenance of theological opinions, so flattering to their vanity, and so favourable to their usurped power, for the most part made a common cause with their priests; they believed that that religious system which they themselves adopted must be the most convenient and useful to their interests; then, consequently, those who refused to adopt it, were treated by them as enemies. The most religious sovereign became, either politically or through piety, the executioner of one part of his subjects: he believed it to be a sacred duty to tyrannize over the thought, to overwhelm and to crush the enemies of his priests, whom he always believed to be the enemies of his own authority. In cutting their throats, he imagined he did that which at the same time discharged his duty to heaven, and what he owed to his own security. He did not see that by immolating victims to his priests, he strengthened the enemies of his power, the rivals of his greatness, the least subjected of his subjects.

Indeed, according to the false notions
with

with which the minds of sovereigns and the superstitious people have been so long prepossessed, we find that every thing in society concurs to gratify the pride, the avidity, the vengeance of the sacerdotal order. Every where, we see, that the most restless, the most dangerous, the most useless men are those who are recompensed the most amply. We see those who are born enemies to the sovereign power, honoured and cherished by it; the most rebellious subjects looked upon as the supports of the throne; the corrupters of youth rendered the exclusive masters of education; the least laborious of the citizens richly paid for their idleness, for their futile speculations, for their fatal discord, for their inefficacious prayers, for their expiations so dangerous to morals, and so suitable to encourage crime.

For thousands of years past, nations and sovereigns have been despoiling themselves in emulation of each other, to enrich the ministers of the gods, to make them roll in the greatest abundance, to load them with honours, to decorate them with titles, privileges,

leges, and immunities; to make them bad citizens. What are the fruits that the people and kings have gathered from their imprudent kindness, from their religious prodigality? Have princes become more powerful; have nations become more happy, more flourishing, more reasonable? No! without doubt; the sovereign lost the greater portion of his authority, he was the slave of his priests, or he was obliged to be continually wrestling against them; and the greater part of the riches of society was employed to support, in idleness, luxury, and splendour, the most useless, the most dangerous of its members.

Did the morals of the people become better under these guides, so liberally paid? Alas! the superstitious never knew them; religion had taken place of every thing else in them; its ministers, satisfied with maintaining the doctrines and the customs useful to their own interests, only invented fictitious crimes, multiplied painful or ridiculous customs, to the end that they might turn even the transgressions of their slaves to their own profit. They every where exercised

exercised a monopoly of expiations; they made a traffic of the pretended pardons from above, they fixed a book of rates for crimes; the most serious were always those which the sacerdotal order judged the most injurious to his views. IMPIETY, HERESY, SACRILEGE, BLASPHEMY, &c. vague words, and devoid of sense, which have evidently no other object than chimeras, interesting only to the priests, alarmed their minds much more than real crimes, and truly interesting to society. Thus, the ideas of the people were totally overturned; imaginary crimes frightened them much more than true crimes. A man, whose opinions and abstract systems did not harmonize with those of the priests, was much more abhorred than an assassin, than a tyrant, than an oppressor, than a robber, than a seducer, or than a corrupter. The greatest of all wickedness, was the despising of that which the priests were desirous should be looked upon as sacred*. The civil

* The celebrated GORDON says, that *the most abominable of heresies is, to believe there is any other god than the clergy.*

laws concurred also to this confusion of ideas; they punished in the most atrocious manner those unknown crimes which the imagination had exaggerated; heretics, blasphemers, infidels, were burnt; no punishment was decreed against the corrupters of innocence, adulterers, knaves, calumniators.

Under such instructors, what could become of youth? It was shamefully sacrificed to superstition. Man from his infancy was poisoned by them with unintelligible notions, they fed him with mysteries and fables, they drenched him with a doctrine to which he was obliged to acquiesce, without being able to comprehend it; they disturbed his mind with vain phantoms; they cramped his genius with sacred trifles, with puerile duties, with mechanical devotions*. They made him lose his most precious

* Superstition has fascinated the human mind to such a degree, and made such mere machines of men, that there are a great many countries, in which the people do not understand the language of which they make use to speak to their god. We see WOMEN, who have

precious time in customs and ceremonies; they filled his head with sophisms, and with errors; they intoxicated him with fanaticism; they prepossessed him for ever against reason and truth; the energy of his soul was placed under continual shackles; he could never soar, he could never render himself useful to his associates; the importance which they attached to the divine science, or rather the systematic ignorance which served for the basis of religion, rendered it impossible for the most fertile soil to produce any thing but thorns.

Does a religious and sacerdotal education form citizens, fathers of families, husbands, just masters, faithful servants, humble subjects, pacific associates? No! it either makes peevish and morose devotees, incommodi-

no other occupation all their lives, than singing Latin, without understanding a word of the language. The people who comprehend no part of their worship, assist at it very punctually, in the idea that it is sufficient to shew themselves to their god, who takes it kind of them that they should come and weary themselves in his temples.

ous to themselves and to others, or men without principles, who presently sink in oblivion the terrors with which they have been imbued, and who never knew the laws of morality. Religion was placed above every thing; the fanatic was told *that it were better to obey God than men*; in consequence, he believed that he must revolt against his prince, detach himself from his wife, detest his child, estrange himself from his friend, cut the throats of his fellow-citizens, every time that they questioned the interests of heaven. In short, religious education, when it had its effect, only served to corrupt juvenile hearts, to fascinate youthful minds, to degrade young souls, to make man mistake that which he owed to himself, to society, and to the beings which surrounded him.

What advantages might not nations have reaped, if they would have employed on useful objects, those riches which ignorance has so shamefully lavished on the ministers of imposture! What progress might not genius have made, if it had enjoyed those recompences, accorded, during so

many ages, to those, who are at all times opposed to its elevation! To what a degree might not the useful sciences, the arts, morality, politics, truth, have been perfected, if they had had the same succours as falsehood, delirium, enthusiasm, and inutility!

It is, then, evident, that the theological notions were and will be perpetually contrary to sound politics and to sound morality; they change sovereigns into mischievous, restless, and jealous divinities; they make of subjects envious and wicked slaves, who, by the assistance of some futile ceremonies, or by their exterior acquiescence to some unintelligible opinions, imagine themselves amply compensated for the evil which they commit against each other. Those who have never dared to examine into the existence of a god, who rewards and punishes; those who persuade themselves that their duties are founded upon the divine will; those who pretend that this god desires that men should live in peace, cherishing each other, lending each other mutual assistance, and abstaining from evil,
and

and that they should do good to each other, presently lose sight of these sterile speculations as soon as present interests, passions, habits, or importunate whims, hurry them away. Where shall we find the equity, the union, the peace, and concord, which these sublime notions, supported by superstition and divine authority, promise to those societies under whose eyes they are unceasingly placing them? Under the influence of corrupt courts and priests, who are either imposters or fanatics, who are never in harmony with each other, I only see vicious men, degraded by ignorance, enslaved by criminal habits, swayed by transient interests, or by shameful pleasures, who do not think of their God. In despite of his theological ideas, the courtier continues to weave his dark plots; he labours to gratify his ambition, his avidity, his hatred, his vengeance, and all those passions inherent to the perversity of his being: maugre this hell, of which the idea alone makes her tremble, the corrupt woman persists in her intrigues, her impostures, her adulteries. The greater part of men, dissipated, dissolute, and
without

without morals, who fill cities and courts, would recoil with horror, if the smallest doubt was exhibited to them of the exist- of that god whom they outrage. What good results from the practice of this opinion so universal and so barren, which never has any other kind of influence on the conduct, than to serve as a pretext to the most dangerous passions? On quitting that temple, in which they have been sacrificing, delivering out the divine oracles, and terrifying crime in the name of heaven, does not the religious despot, who would scruple to omit the pretended duties which superstition imposes on him, return to his vices, his injustice, his political crimes, his transgressions against society? Does not the minister return to his vexations, the courtier to his intrigues, the woman of galantry to her prostitution, the publican to his extortions, the merchant to his frauds and tricks?

Will it be pretended that those assassins, those robbers, those unfortunates, whom the injustice or the negligence of government multiply, and from whom laws, frequently

quently cruel, barbarously wrest their life,—will they pretend, I say, that these malefactors, who every day fill our gibbets and our scaffolds, are incredulous or atheists? No! without doubt, these miserable beings, these outcasts of society, believe in God; his name has been repeated to them in their infancy, they have been told of the punishments destined for crimes; they have been habituated in early life to tremble at the sight of his judgments; nevertheless they have outraged society; their passions, stronger than their fears, not having been capable of restraint by the visible motives, have not for much stronger reasons been restrained by invisible motives: a concealed god, and his distant punishments, never will be able to hinder those excesses, which present and assured torments are incapable of preventing.

In short, do we not, every moment, see men persuaded that their god views them, hears them, encompasses them, and who yet do not stop on that account when they have the desire of gratifying their passions, and of committing the most dishonest actions?

tions? The same man who would fear the inspection of another man, whose presence would prevent him from committing a bad action, or delivering himself up to some scandalous vice, permits himself to do every thing, when he believes he is seen only by his god. What purpose, then, does the conviction of the existence of this god, of his omniscience, of his ubiquity or his presence in all parts, answer, since it imposes much less on the conduct of man, than the idea of being seen by the least of his fellow men? Him, who would not dare to commit a fault, even in the presence of an infant, will make no scruple of boldly committing it, when he shall have only his god for witness. These indubitable facts may serve for a reply to those who shall tell us, that the fear of God is more suitable to restrain the actions of men, than the idea of having nothing to fear from him. When men believe they have only their god to fear, they commonly stop at nothing.

Those persons, who do not suspect the most trivial of religious notions, and of their efficacy

efficacy, very rarely employ them, when they are disposed to influence the conduct of those who are subordinate to them, and to reconduct them into the paths of reason. In the advice which a father gives to his vicious or criminal son, he rather represents to him the present and temporal inconveniences to which his conduct exposes him, than the danger he encounters in offending an avenging god: he makes him foresee the natural consequences of his irregularities, his health deranged by his debaucheries, the loss of his reputation, the ruin of his fortune by play, the punishments of society, &c. Thus the deicolist himself, in the most important occasions of life, reckons much more upon the force of natural motives, than upon the supernatural motives furnished by religion: the same man who vilifies the motives which an atheist can have to do good, and abstain from evil, makes use of them on this occasion, because he feels the full force of them.

Almost all men believe in an avenging and remunerating god; nevertheless, in all

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countries, we find that the number of the wicked exceed by much that of the honest men. If we penetrate into the true cause of so general a corruption, we shall find it in the theological notions themselves and not in those imaginary sources which the different religions of the world have invented, in order to account for human depravity. Men are corrupt, because they are almost every where badly governed; they are unworthily governed, because religion has deified the sovereigns; these, perverted and assured of impunity, have necessarily rendered their people miserable and wicked. Submitted to irrational masters, the people have never been guided by reason. Blinded by priests, who are impostors, their reason became useless; tyrants and priests have combined their efforts with success, to prevent nations from becoming enlightened, from seeking after truth, from ameliorating their condition, from rendering their morals more honest, and from obtaining liberty.

It is only by enlightening men, by shewing them demonstration, by announcing
truth

truth to them, that we can promise ourselves to render them better and happier. It is by making known to sovereigns and to subjects their true relations, and their true interests, that politics will be perfected, and that it will be felt that the art of governing mortals is not the art of blinding them, of deceiving them, of tyrannizing over them. Let us, then, consult reason ; let us call in experience to our aid ; let us interrogate nature, and we shall find what is necessary to be done, to labour efficaciously to the happiness of the human species. We shall see that error is the true source of the evils of our species ; that it is in cheering our hearts, in dissipating those vain phantoms, of which the idea makes us tremble, in laying the axe to the root of superstition, that we can peaceably seek after truth, and find in nature the flambeau that can guide us to felicity. Let us, then, study nature ; let us observe its immutable laws ; let us search into the essence of man ; let us cure him of his prejudices, and by these means we shall conduct him, by an easy and gentle

declivity, to virtue, without which he will feel that he cannot be permanently happy in the world which he inhabits.

Let us, then, undeceive mortals on those gods who every where make nothing but unfortunates. Let us substitute visible nature to those unknown powers who have in all times only been served by trembling slaves, or by delirious enthusiasts. Let us tell them that, in order to be happy, they must cease to fear.

The ideas of the divinity, which, as we have seen are of such inutility, and, so contrary to sound morality, do not procure more striking advantages to individuals, than to society. In every country, the divinity was as we have seen, represented under the most revolting traits, and the superstitious man, when he was consequent to his principles, was always an unhappy being ; superstition is a domestic enemy which man always carries within himself. Those who shall seriously occupy themselves with this formidable phantom, will live in continual agonies and inquietude ; they will neglect those objects which are the most worthy of
interesting

interesting them, to run after chimeras; they will commonly pass their melancholy days in groaning, in praying, in sacrificing, in expiating the faults, real or imaginary, which they believe calculated to offend their rigid god. Frequently in their fury, they will torment themselves, they will make a duty of inflicting upon themselves the most barbarous punishments to prevent the blows of a god ready to strike; they will arm themselves against themselves, in the hopes of disarming the vengeance and the cruelty of an atrocious master, whom they think they have irritated; they will believe they appease an angry god in becoming the executioners of themselves, and doing themselves all the harm their imagination will be capable of inventing. Society reaps no benefit from the mournful notions of these pious irrationals; their mind finds itself continually absorbed by their sad reveries, and their time is dissipated in irrational ceremonies. The most religious men are commonly misanthropists, extremely useless to the world, and injurious to themselves. If they shew energy, it is only to imagine means to afflict themselves,

themselves, to put themselves to torture, to deprive themselves of those objects which their nature desires. We find, in all the countries of the earth, PENITENTS intimately persuaded that by dint of barbarities exercised upon themselves, and lingering suicide, they shall merit the favour of a ferocious god, of whom, however, they every where publish the goodness. We see madmen of this species in all parts of the world, the idea of a terrible god has in all times and in all places, given birth to the most cruel extravagancies!

If these irrational devotees injure themselves, and deprive society of that assistance which they owe it, they are, without doubt, less capable of doing harm than those turbulent and zealous fanatics, who, filled with their religious ideas, believe themselves obliged to disturb the world, and to commit real crimes to sustain the cause of their cœlestial phantom. It very frequently happens, that in outraging morality, the fanatic supposes he renders himself agreeable to his god. He makes perfection consist either in tormenting himself, or breaking, in favour of his fantastical notions,

notions, the most sacred ties which nature has made for mortals.

Let us, then, acknowledge, that the ideas of the divinity are not more suitable to procure the well-being, the content, and peace of individuals than of the society of which they are members. If some peaceable, honest, inconclusive enthusiasts find consolation and comfort in their religious ideas, there are millions who, more conclusive to their principles, are unhappy during their whole life, perpetually assailed by the melancholy ideas of a fatal god, which their disordered imagination shews them every instant. Under a formidable god, a tranquil and peaceable devotee is a man who has not reasoned upon him.

In short, every thing proves to us that religious ideas have the strongest influence over men to torment them, to divide them, and to render them unhappy; they heat their mind, they envenom their passions, without ever restraining them, but when they are too feeble to hurry them along.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

THEOLOGICAL NOTIONS CANNOT BE THE BASIS OF MORALITY. COMPARISON BETWEEN THEOLOGICAL MORALITY AND NATURAL MORALITY. THEOLOGY PREJUDICIAL TO THE PROGRESS OF THE HUMAN MIND.

A Supposition, to be useful to men, ought to render them happy. What right have we to flatter ourselves that an hypothesis which here below makes only unhappy beings, may one day conduct us to permanent felicity? If God has only made mortals to tremble and to groan in this world, of which they have a knowledge, upon what foundation can they promise themselves that he will consent, in the end, to treat them with more gentleness in an unknown world. Every man to whom we see him commit crying injustice, even transiently, ought it not to render him extremely

ly

ly suspected by us, and make him for ever forfeit our confidence?

On the other hand, a supposition which should throw light on every thing, or which should give an easy solution to all the questions to which it should be applied, when even they should not be able to demonstrate the certitude, would probably be true: but a system which should only obscure the clearest notions, and render more insoluble all the problems which should be desired to be resolved by its means, would most certainly be looked upon as false, as useless, as dangerous. To convince ourselves of this principle, let us examine, without prejudice, if the existence of the theological god has ever given the solution of any one difficulty. Has the human understanding progressed a single step by the assistance of theology? This science, so important and so sublime, has it not totally obscured morality? Has it not rendered the most essential duties of our nature doubtful and problematical? Has it not shamefully confounded all the notions of justice and injustice, of vice and of virtue?

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Indeed,

Indeed, what is virtue in the ideas of our theologians? It is, they will tell us, that which is conformable to the will of the incomprehensible being who governs nature. But what is this being, of whom they are unceasingly speaking to us, without being able to comprehend it; and how can we have a knowledge of his will? Forthwith they will tell you what this being is not, without ever being capable of telling you what he is; if they undertake to give you an idea of him, they will heap upon this hypothetical being a multitude of contradictory and incompatible attributes, which will form a chimera impossible to be conceived; or else they will refer you to those supernatural revelations, by which this phantom hath made known his divine intentions to men. But how will they prove the authenticity of these revelations? It will be by miracles! How can we believe miracles, which, as we have seen, are contrary even to those notions which theology gives us of its intelligent, immutable, and omnipotent divinity? As a last resource, then, it will be necessary
to

to give credit to the honesty and good faith of the priests, who are charged with announcing to us the divine oracles. But who will assure us of their mission? Is it not these priests who announce themselves to us as the infallible interpreters of a god, whom they avow they do not know. This granted, the priests, that is to say, men extremely suspicious, and but little in harmony amongst themselves, will be the arbiters of morality; they will decide, according to their uncertain knowledge, or their passions, those laws which ought to be followed; enthusiasm or interest are the only standard of their decisions; their morality is as variable as their whims and their caprice; those who shall listen to them, will never know to what line of conduct they shall adhere; in their inspired books, we shall always find a divinity of little morality, who will sometimes command crime and absurdity; who will sometimes be the friend and sometimes the enemy of the human race; who will sometimes be benevolent, reasonable, and just; and who will sometimes be irrational,

capricious, unjust, and despotic. What will result from all this to a rational man? It will be, that neither inconstant gods, nor their priests, of whom the interests vary every moment, can be the models or the arbiters of a morality which ought to be as regular and as certain as the invariable laws of nature, from which we never see it derogate.

No! they are not arbitrary and inconclusive opinions, contradictory notions, abstract and unintelligible speculations, which can serve for the basis of the science of morals. They are evident principles, deduced from the nature of man, founded upon his wants, inspired by education, rendered familiar by habit, made sacred by laws, which will carry conviction to our minds, which will render virtue useful and dear to us, which will people nations with honest men and good citizens. A god, necessarily incomprehensible, presents nothing but a vague idea to our imagination; a terrible god leads it astray; a changeable god, and who is frequently in contradiction with himself, will always prevent

prevent us from ascertaining the road we ought to keep. The menaces which shall be made to us, on the part of a fantastical being, who is unceasingly in contradiction with our nature, of which he is the author, will never do more than render virtue disagreeable to us; fear alone will make us practise that which reason and our own immediate interest ought to make us execute with pleasure. A terrible or wicked god, which is the same thing, will never serve but to disturb honest people, without arresting the progress of the profligate and flagitious; the greater part of men, when they shall be disposed to sin, or deliver themselves up to vicious propensities, will cease to see the terrible god, and will only see the merciful God, who is filled with goodness; men never see things but on the side which is most conformable to their desires.

The goodness of God cheers the wicked, his rigour disturbs the honest man. Thus, the qualities which theology attributes to its god, turn out themselves disadvantageous to sound morality. It is upon this infinite
goodness

goodness that the most corrupted men will have the audacity to reckon when they are hurried along by crime, or given up to habitual vice. If, then, we speak to them of their god, they tell us that *God is good*, that his clemency and his mercy are infinite; does not superstition, the accomplice of the iniquities of mortals, unceasingly repeat to them, in all countries, that by the assistance of certain ceremonies, of certain prayers, of certain acts of piety, they can appease the terrible god, and cause themselves to be received with open arms, by this softened and relenting god? Do not the priests of all nations possess infallible secrets for reconciling the most perverse men to the divinity?

It must be concluded from thence, that under whatever point of view the divinity is considered, he cannot serve for the basis of morality, formed to be always invariably the same. An irascible god is only useful to those who have an interest in terrifying men, that they may take advantage of their ignorance, of their fears, of their expiations; the nobles of the earth, who are
commonly

commonly mortals the most destitute of virtue and of morals, will not see this formidable god, when they shall be inclined to yield to their passions; they will, however, make use of him, to frighten others, to the end that they may enslave them, and and keep them under their guardianship, whilst they will themselves only contemplate this god, under the traits of his goodness; they will always see him indulgent to those outrages which they commit against his creatures, provided they have a respect for him themselves; besides, religion will furnish them with easy means of appeasing his wrath. This religion appears to have been invented only to furnish to the ministers of the divinity an opportunity to expiate the crimes of the earth.

Morality is not made to follow the caprice of the imagination, the passions, the interests of men: it ought to possess stability; it ought to be the same for all the individuals of the human race; it ought not to vary in one country, or in one time from another; religion has no right to make its
immutable

immutable rules bend to the changeable laws of its gods. There is only one method to give morality this firm solidity, we have more than once, in the course of this Work, pointed it out * ; there is no other way than to found it upon our duties, upon the nature of man, upon the relations subsisting between intelligent beings, who are, on their parts, each of them in love with their happiness, and occupied with conserving themselves ; who live together in society, to the end that they may more surely attain these ends. In short, we must take for the basis of morality the necessity of things.

In weighing these principles, drawn from nature, which are self evident, confirmed by constant experience, and approved by reason, we shall have a certain morality, and a system of conduct, which will never be in contradiction with itself. Man will have no occasion to recur to theological chimeras to regulate his conduct in the visible world. We shall be capacitated to reply to those who pretend that without

* See the FIRST PART, CHAPTER VIII, of this Work ; also what is said in CHAPTER XII, and at the conclusion of CHAPTER XIV of the same part.

a god, there cannot be any morality; and that this god, by virtue of his power and the sovereign empire which belongs to him over his creatures, hath alone the right to impose laws upon them, and to submit them to those duties to which they are compelled. If we reflect on the long train of errors and of wanderings that flow from the obscure notions which we have of the divinity, and of the sinister ideas which all religions in every country give, it would be more conformable to truth, to say that all sound morality, all morality useful to the human species, all morality advantageous for society, is totally incompatible with a being who is never presented to men but under the form of an absolute monarch, whose good qualities are continually eclipsed by dangerous caprices: consequently, we shall be obliged to acknowledge, that to establish morality upon a sure foundation, we must necessarily commence by overturning the chimerical systems upon which they have hitherto founded the ruinous edifice of supernatural morality, which, during so many ages, has been

uselessly preached up to the inhabitants of the earth.

Whatever may have been the cause that placed man in the abode which he inhabits, and that gave him his faculties; whether we consider the human species as the work of nature, or whether we suppose that he owes his existence to an intelligent being, distinguished from nature; the existence of man, such as he is, is a fact; we see in him a being, who feels, who thinks, who has intelligence, who loves himself, who tends to his own conservation; who, in every moment of his life, strives to render his existence agreeable; who, the more easily to satisfy his wants, and to procure himself pleasure, lives in society with beings similar to himself, whom his conduct can render favourable or disaffected to him. It is, then, upon these general sentiments, inherent in our nature, and which will subsist as long as the race of mortals, that we ought to found morality, which is only the science of the duties of men living in society.

Here,

Here, then, are the true foundations of our duties; these duties are necessary, seeing that they flow from our peculiar nature, and that we cannot arrive at the happiness we propose to ourselves, if we do not take the means without which we shall never obtain it. Then, to be permanently happy, we are obliged to merit the affection and the assistance of those beings with whom we are associated; these will not take upon themselves to love us, to esteem us, to assist us in our projects, to labour to our peculiar felicity, but in proportion as we are disposed to labour to their happiness. It is this necessity, which is called MORAL OBLIGATION. It is founded upon reflection, on the motives capable of determining sensible and intelligent beings, who tend towards an end, to follow the conduct necessary to arrive at it. These motives can be in us only the desire, always regenerating, of procuring ourselves good and of avoiding evil. Pleasure and pain, the hope of happiness or the fear of misery, are the only motives capable of having an efficacious influence on the will

of sensible beings ; to *compel* them, then, it is sufficient that these motives exist, and may be known ; to know them, it is sufficient to consider our constitution, according to which we can love or approve in ourselves only those actions from whence result our real and reciprocal utility, which constitutes virtue. In consequence, to conserve ourselves, to enjoy security, we are *compelled* to follow the conduct necessary to this end ; to interest others in our own conservation, we are obliged to interest ourselves in their's, or to do nothing that may interrupt in them the will of co-operating with us to our own felicity. Such are the true foundations of MORAL OBLIGATION.

We shall always deceive ourselves, when we shall be disposed to give any other basis to morality than the nature of man ; we cannot have any that is more solid and more certain. Some authors, even of integrity, have thought, that, to render more respectable and more sacred in the eyes of men, those duties which nature imposes on them, it were needful to clothe them
with

with the authority of a being, which they have made superior to nature, and stronger than necessity. Theology has, in consequence, invaded morality, or has strove to connect it to the religious system; it has been thought, that this union would render virtue more sacred; that the fear of the invisible powers, who govern nature herself, would give more weight and efficacy to its laws; in short, it has been imagined, that men, persuaded of the necessity of morality, in seeing it united with religion, would look upon this religion itself as necessary to their happiness. Indeed, it is the supposition that a god is necessary to support morality, that sustains the theological ideas, and the greater part of the religious systems of the earth; it is imagined, that without a god, man would neither have a knowledge of, nor practise that which he owes to others. This prejudice once established, it is always believed that the vague ideas of a metaphysical god are in such a manner connected with morality, and the welfare of society, that the divinity cannot be attacked, without overturning

turning at the same time the duties of nature. It is thought, that want, the desire of happiness, the evident interest of society, and of individuals, would be impotent motives, if they did not borrow all their force and their *function*, from an imaginary being, who has been made the arbiter of all things.

But it is always dangerous to connect fiction with truth, the unknown with the known, the delirium of enthusiasm with the tranquillity of reason. Indeed, what results from the confused alliance which theology has made of its marvellous chimeras with realities: the imagination, bewildered, mistook truth; religion, by the aid of its phantom, would command nature, make reason bend under its yoke, submit man to its own peculiar caprices, and frequently, in the name of the divinity, it obliged him to stifle his nature, and to piously violate the most evident duties of morality. When this same religion was desirous of restraining mortals, whom it had taken care to render blind and irrational, it gave them only ideal curbs and motives;

tives ; it could substitute only imaginary causes to true causes ; marvellous and supernatural motive-powers to those which were natural and known ; romances and fables, to realities. By this inversion, morality no longer had any fixed principles ; nature, reason, virtue, demonstration, depended upon an undefinable god, who never spake distinctly, who silenced reason, who only explained himself by inspired beings, by impostors, by fanatics, whose delirium or the desire of profiting by the wanderings of men, interested them in preaching up only an abject submission, factitious virtues, frivolous ceremonies, in short, an arbitrary morality, conformable to their own peculiar passions, and frequently very prejudicial to the rest of the human species.

Thus, in making morality flow from god, they in reality submitted it to the passions of men. In being disposed to found it upon a chimera, they founded it upon nothing ; in deriving it from an imaginary being, of whom every one forms to himself a different notion, of whom the obscure oracles were interpreted either by men in
a delirium,

a delirium, or by knaves, in establishing it upon his pretended will, goodness, or malignity, in short, the MORALITY of human actions; in proposing to man, for his model, a being who is supposed to be changeable, the theologians, far from giving to morality a steady basis, have weakened, or even annihilated, that which is given it by nature, and have substituted in its place, nothing but incertitude. This god, by the qualities which are given him, is an inexplicable ænigma, which each expounds after his own manner, which each religion explains in its own mode, in which all the theologians of the world discover every thing that suits their purpose, and according to which each man separately forms his morals, conformable to his peculiar character. If God tells the gentle, indulgent, equitable man to be good, compassionate, benevolent, he tells the furious man, who is destitute of compassion, to be intolerant, inhuman, without pity. The morality of this god varies in each man, from one country to another, some people shiver with hor-

ror at the sight of those actions which other people look upon as sacred and meritorious. Some see God filled with gentleness and mercy; others judge him to be cruel, and imagine that it is by cruelties that they can acquire the advantage of pleasing him.

The morality of nature is clear; it is evident even for those who outrage it. It is not so with religious morality, this is as obscure as the divinity who prescribes it, or rather as changeable as the passions and the temperaments of those who make him speak, or who adore him. If it was left to the theologians, morality ought to be considered as a science the most problematical, the most uncertain, the most difficult to fix. It would require the most subtile or the most profound genius, the most penetrating and active mind, to discover the principles of the duties of man towards himself and others. Are not, then, the true sources of morality calculated to be known only to a small number of thinkers or of metaphysicians? To derive it from a god, whom nobody sees but within himself, and which each modifies after his

own peculiar ideas, is to submit it to the caprice of each man; to derive it from a being which no man upon the earth can boast of knowing, is to say they do not know from whence it could come to us. Whatever may be the agent upon whom they make nature and all the beings which it contains, depend, whatever power they may suppose him to have, it is very possible that man does or does not exist, but as soon as he shall have made him what he is, when he shall have rendered him sensible, in love with his being, and living in society, he will not be able, without annihilating him, or new moulding him, to cause him to exist otherwise than he does. According to his actual essence, qualities, and modifications, which constitute him a being of the human species, morality is necessary to him, and the desire of conserving himself will make him prefer virtue to vice, by the same necessity that it makes him prefer pleasure to pain*.

To

* According to THEOLOGY, man hath occasion for SUPERNATURAL GRACE to do good: this doctrine was, without doubt, very hurtful to sound morality.

Men

To say that man cannot have any moral sentiments, without the idea of God, is to say that he cannot distinguish vice from virtue; it is to pretend, that, without the idea of God, man would not feel the necessity of eating to live, would not make any distinction or choice in his food: it is to pretend, that without being acquainted with the name, the character, and the qualities of him who prepares a mess for us, we are not in a state to judge whether this mess is agreeable or disagreeable to us, whether it be good or bad. Him who does not know what opinion to hold upon the existence and the moral attributes of a god, or who formally denies them, cannot, at least, doubt of his own existence, of his

Men always waited for the *call from above* to do good, and those who governed them, never employed the *calls from below*, that is to say, the natural motives to excite them to virtue. Nevertheless TERTULLIAN says to us, *wherefore will ye trouble yourselves, seeking after the law of God, whilst ye have that which is common to all the world, and which is wrote on the tables of nature?*

TERTULL. DE CORONA MILITIS.

own qualities, of his own mode of feeling and of judging: neither can he doubt the existence of other organized beings like himself, in whom every thing shews him qualities analogous to his own, and of whom he can, by certain actions, attract the love or the hatred, the assistance or the ill will, the esteem or the contempt: this knowledge is sufficient for him to distinguish moral good and evil. In short, every man enjoying a well ordered organization, or the faculty of making true experience, will only have to contemplate himself, in order to discover what he owes to others: his own nature will enlighten him much better upon his duties than those gods which he can only consult in his own passions, or in those of some enthusiasts or impostors. He will acknowledge, that to conserve himself, and procure his own permanent well being, he is obliged to resist the impulsion, frequently blind, of his own desires; and that to conciliate the benevolence of others, he must act in a mode conformable to their's; in reasoning thus, he will know what virtue is :

is *; if he puts this theory into practice, he will be virtuous; he will be rewarded for his conduct, by the happy harmony of his machine, by the legitimate esteem of himself, confirmed by the kindness of others: if he acts in a contrary mode, the trouble and the disorder of his machine will quickly warn him that nature, whom he thwarts, disapproves his conduct, which is injurious to himself, and he will be obliged to subscribe to the condemnation of others, who will hate him, and blame his actions. If the wanderings of his mind prevent him

* THEOLOGY hitherto has not known how to give a true definition of VIRTUE. According to it, it is an effect of grace, that disposes us to do that which is agreeable to the divinity. But what is the divinity? What is grace? How doth it act upon man? What is that, which is agreeable to God? Wherefore doth not this God give to all men the grace to do that which is agreeable in his eye? *Adhuc sub judice lis est.* Men are unceasingly told to do good, because God requires it; never have they been informed what it was to do good, and they have never been able to instruct them, neither what God was, nor that which he was willing they should do.

from

from seeing the most immediate consequences of his irregularities, neither will he see the distant rewards and punishments of the invisible monarch, whom they have so vainly placed in the empyræum; this god will never speak to him in so distinct a manner as his conscience, which will reward him or punish him on the spot.

Every thing that has been said, evidently proves to us, that religious morality is an infinite loser by being compared with the morality of nature, with which it is found in perpetual contradiction. Nature invites man to love himself, to conserve himself, to incessantly augment the sum of his happiness: religion orders him to love only a formidable god, that deserves to be hated, to detest himself, to sacrifice to his frightful idol, the most pleasing and legitimate pleasures of his heart. Nature tells man to consult reason, and to take it for his guide: religion teaches him that this reason is corrupted, that it is only a treacherous guide, given by a deceitful god, to lead his creatures astray. Nature tells man to enlighten himself, to search after truth, to
instruct

instruct himself in his duties: religion enjoins him to examine nothing, to remain in ignorance, to fear truth; it persuades him, that there are no relations more important to him, than those which subsist between him and a being of whom he will never have any knowledge. Nature tells the being who is in love with himself, to moderate his passions, to resist them when they are destructive to himself, to counterbalance them by real motives borrowed from experience: religion tells the sensible being to have no passions, to be an insensible mass, or to combat his propensities by motives borrowed from the imagination, and variable as itself. Nature tells man to be sociable, to love his fellow-creatures, to be just, peaceable, indulgent, benevolent, to cause or suffer his associates to enjoy their opinions: religion counsels him to fly society, to detach himself from his fellow-creatures, to hate them, when their imagination does not procure them dreams conformable to his own, to break the most sacred bonds to please his God, to torment, to afflict, to persecute, to massacre those who
will

will not be mad after his own manner. Nature tells man in society to cherish glory, to labour to render himself estimable, to be active, courageous, industrious: religion tells him to be humble, abject, pusillanimous, to live in obscurity, to occupy himself with prayers, with meditations, with ceremonies; it says to him, be useless to thyself, and do nothing for others*. Nature proposes to the citizen for a model, men endued with honest, noble, energetic souls, who have usefully served their fellow citizens; religion commends to them abject souls, extols pious enthusiasts, frantic penitents, fanatics, who, for the most ridiculous opinions, have disturbed empires. Nature tells the husband to be tender, to attach himself to the company of his mate, to cherish her in his bosom: religion makes to him a crime of his tenderness, and frequently obliges him

* It is very easy to feel, that religious worship does a real injury to political societies, by the loss of time, by the laziness and inaction which it causes, and of which it makes a duty. Indeed religion suspends the most useful labours, during a considerable portion of the year.

to look upon the conjugal bonds as a state of pollution and imperfection. Nature tells the father to cherish his children, and to make them useful members of society: religion tells him, to rear them in the fear of God, and to make them blind and superstitious, incapable of serving society, but extremely well calculated to disturb its repose. Nature tells children to honour, to love, to listen to their parents, to be the support of their old age: religion telleth them to prefer the oracles of their god, and to trample father and mother under feet, when there is a question of the divine interests. Nature says to the philosopher, occupy thyself with useful objects, consecrate thy cares to thy country, make for it advantageous discoveries, calculated to perfection its condition: religion saith to him, occupy thyself with useless reveries, with endless disputes, with researches suitable to sow the seeds of discord and carnage, and obstinately maintain opinions, which thou wilt never understand thyself. Nature tells the perverse man, to blush for his vices, for his shameful propensities, for his crimes;

it shews him, that his most secret irregularities will necessarily have an influence on his own felicity: religion saith to the most corrupted and wicked man, “Do not
“irritate a God, whom thou knowest not;
“but, if against his laws thou deliverest
“thyself up to crime, remember that he
“will be easily appeased; go into his
“temple, humiliate thyself at the feet of
“his ministers, expiate thy transgressions
“by sacrifices, by offerings, by ceremonies,
“and by prayers: these important ceremonies, will pacify thy conscience, and
“cleanse thee in the eyes of the Eternal.”

The citizen, or the man in society, is not less depraved by religion, which is always in contradiction with sound politics. Nature says to man, THOU ART FREE, NO POWER ON EARTH CAN LEGITIMATELY DEPRIVE THEE OF THY RIGHTS: religion cries out to him, that he is a slave, condemned by his God to groan all his life under the iron rod of his representatives. Nature tells man to LOVE THE COUNTRY WHICH GAVE HIM BIRTH, to serve it faithfully, to unite interests with it, against
all

all those who shall attempt to injure it: religion orders him to obey, without murmuring, the tyrants who oppress this country, to serve them against it, to merit their favours, by enslaving their fellow citizens, under their unruly caprices. Nevertheless, if the sovereign be not sufficiently devoted to his priests, religion quickly changes its language; it calls out to subjects to become rebels, it makes it a duty in them, to resist their master, it cries out to them, that it is better to obey God than men. Nature tells princes they are men; that it is not their whim that can decide what is just, and what is unjust, THAT THE PUBLIC WILL MAKETH THE LAW: religion, sometimes says to them, that they are gods, to whom nothing in this world ought to offer resistance; sometimes it transforms them into tyrants, whom enraged heaven is desirous should be immolated to its wrath.

Religion corrupts princes; these princes corrupt the law, which, like themselves, becomes unjust; all the institutions are perverted; education forms only men who are base, blinded with prejudices smitten with

vain objects, with riches, with pleasures which they can obtain only by iniquitous means: nature is mistaken, reason is disdained, virtue is only a chimera, quickly sacrificed to the slightest interest; and religion, far from remedying these evils, to which it hath given birth, doth no more than aggravate them still farther; or else it only causes sterile regret, quickly effaced by itself, and obliged to yield to the torrent of habit, of example, of propensities, of dissipation, which conspire to hurry all men to commit crimes, who will not renounce their well-being.

Here is the mode in which religion and politics unite their efforts, only to pervert, abuse, and poison the heart of man; all the human institutions appear to have for object, only to render men base or wicked. Do not let us, then, be at all astonished, if morality is every where only a barren speculation, from which every one is obliged to deviate in practice, if he will not risque the rendering himself unhappy. Men have morals only when renouncing their prejudices they consult their nature, but the
continual

continual impulfions, which their fouls are receiving every moment, on the part of more powerful motives, quickly oblige them to forget thofe rules which nature impofes on them. They are continually floating between vice and virtue; we fee them unceafingly in contradiction with themfelves; if fometimes they feel the value of an honeft conduct, experience quickly fhews them, that this conduct cannot conduct them to any thing, and can even become an invincible obftacle to that happinefs which their heart never ceafes fearching after. In corrupt focieties, it is neceffary to become corrupt, in order to become happy.

The citizens, led aftray at the fame time, both by their fpiritual and temporal guides, neither knew reafon nor virtue. The flaves of both gods and men, they had all the vices attached to flavery; kept in a perpetual ftate of infancy, they had neither knowledge nor principles; thofe who preached up virtue to them, knew nothing of it themfelves, and could not undeceive them with refpect to thofe playthings in which they had learned to make their happinefs

pinefs confift. In vain they cried out to them, to ftifle their paffions, which every thing confpired to unloofe: in vain they made the thunder of the gods roll to intimidate men, whom the tumult of their paffions rendered deaf. It was quickly perceived, that the gods of heaven were much lefs feared than thofe of the earth; that the favours of thefe procured men a much more certain well-being, than the promifes of the others; that the riches of this world were preferable to the treasures which heaven referved for its favourites; that it was much more advantageous for men to conform themfelves to the views of the vifible powers, than to thofe of powers whom they never faw.

In fhort, fociety, corrupted by its chiefs, and guided by their caprices, could only bring forth corrupt children. It gave birth only to avaricious, ambitious, jealous, and diffolute citizens, who never faw any thing but crime happy, meannefs rewarded, incapacity honoured, fortune adored, rapine favoured, debauchery efteemed; who every where found talents dif-
couraged,

couraged, virtue neglected, truth proscribed, elevation of soul crushed, justice trodden under feet, moderation languishing in misery, and obliged to groan under the weight of haughty injustice.

In the midst of this disorder, of this confusion of ideas, the precepts of morality could only be vague declamations, incapable of convincing any one. What barrier can religion, with its imaginary motive-powers, oppose to the general corruption? When it spake reason, it was not heard; its gods were not sufficiently strong to resist the torrent; its menaces could not arrest those hearts, which every thing hurried on to evil; its distant promises could not counterbalance present advantages; its expiations, always ready to cleanse mortals from their iniquities, emboldened them to persevere in crime; its frivolous ceremonies, calmed their consciences; in short, its zeal, its disputes, its whims, only multiplied and exasperated the evils with which society found itself afflicted; in the most vitiated nations, there were a multitude of devotees, and very few honest men. Great and
small

small listened to religion, when it appeared favourable to their passions; they listened to it no longer, when it was disposed to counteract them. Whenever this religion was conformable to morality, it appeared incommodious, it was only followed, when it combated morality, or totally destroyed it. The despot found it marvellous, when it assured him he was a god upon earth; that his subjects were born to adore him alone, and to administer to his phantasms. He neglected this religion, when it told him to be just; he saw, that from thence, it was in contradiction with itself, and that it was useless to preach equity to a deified mortal. Besides, he was assured that his god would pardon every thing as soon as he should consent to recur to his priests, always ready to reconcile them. The most wicked subjects reckoned, in the same manner, upon their divine assistance; thus, religion, far from restraining them, assured them of impunity; its menaces could not destroy the effects, which its unworthy flattery had produced in princes; these same menaces could not annihilate the

hopes, which its expiations furnished to all. Sovereigns, puffed up with pride, or always certain of expiating their crimes, no longer feared the gods ; become gods themselves, they believed they were permitted to do any thing against poor pitiful mortals, whom they no longer considered in any other light, than as playthings, destined to amuse them here below.

If the nature of man were consulted in politics, which supernatural ideas have so shamefully depraved, it would completely rectify the false notions which are entertained equally by sovereigns and subjects ; it would contribute, more amply than all the religions in the world, to render society happy, powerful and flourishing, under a rational authority. This nature would teach them, that it is for the purpose of enjoying a greater quantum of happiness, that mortals live together in society ; that it is its own conservation, and its felicity that every society should have for its constant and invariable end ; that without equity, it only resembles a collection of enemies ; that the most cruel

enemy to man, is him who deceives him in order to enslave him; that the scourge most to be feared by him, are those priests who corrupt his chiefs, and who assure them of impunity for their crimes, in the name of the gods. It would prove to them, that association is a misfortune under unjust, negligent, and destructive governments.

This nature, interrogated by princes, would teach them, that they are men, and not gods; that their power is only derived from the consent of other men; that they are citizens, charged by other citizens with the care of watching over the safety of the whole; that the law ought to be only the expression of the public will, and that it is never permitted them to counteract nature, or to thwart the invariable end of society. This nature would make these monarchs feel that in order to be truly great and powerful, they ought to command elevated and virtuous souls, and not souls equally degraded by despotism and superstition. This nature would teach sovereigns that in order to be cherished by their subjects, they ought to procure them

them succours, and cause them to enjoy those benefits which the wants of their nature demands for them ; that they ought to maintain them inviolably in the possession of their rights, of which they are the defenders and the guardians. This nature would prove to all those princes who should deign to consult it, that it is only by good works and kindness that they can merit the love and attachment of the people ; that oppression only raises them enemies ; that violence procures them only an unsteady power ; that force cannot confer any legitimate right on them ; and that beings essentially in love with happiness, must sooner or later finish by revolting against an authority that only makes itself felt by violence. Here, then, is the manner in which nature, the sovereign of all beings, and to whom all are equal, would speak to one of those superb monarchs whom flattery hath deified—"Untoward and headstrong child !
" Pigmy, so proud of commanding pig-
" mies ! Have they, then, assured thee
" that thou wert a god ? Have they told

“ thee that thou wert something super-
“ natural? But know, that there is no-
“ thing superior to me. Contemplate
“ thine own insignificance, acknowledge
“ thine impotence against the slightest of
“ my blows. I can break thy sceptre, I
“ can take away thy life, I can reduce thy
“ throne to powder, I can dissolve thy
“ people, I can even destroy the earth,
“ which thou inhabitest; and thou believest
“ thyself a god. Be, then, again thyself;
“ avow that thou art a man, made to sub-
“ mit to my laws, like the least of thy sub-
“ jects. Learn, then, and never let it es-
“ cape thy memory, that thou art the
“ man of thy people; the minister of thy
“ nation; the interpreter and the executor
“ of its will; the fellow citizen of those
“ whom thou hast the right of commanding
“ only because they consent to obey thee,
“ in view of the well-being which thou
“ promisest to procure for them. Reign,
“ then, on this condition, fulfil thy sacred
“ engagements. Be benevolent, and above
“ all, equitable. If thou art willing to
“ have thy power assured to thee, never
“ abuse

“ abuse it ; let it be circumscribed by the im-
“ moveable limits of eternal justice. Be
“ the father of thy people, and they will
“ cherish thee, like thy children. But if
“ thou neglectest them, if thou separatest
“ thine interests from those of thy great
“ family ; if thou refusest to thy sub-
“ jects the happiness which thou owest
“ them ; if thou armest thyself against them,
“ thou shalt be like all tyrants, the slave
“ of gloomy care, of alarm, of cruel sus-
“ picion. Thou wilt become the victim
“ of thine own folly. Thy people, in des-
“ pair, will no longer acknowledge thy
“ DIVINE RIGHTS. In vain, then, thou
“ wouldst sue for aid to that religion
“ which hath deified thee ; it can effect
“ nothing with those people whom misery
“ hath rendered deaf, heaven will abandon
“ thee to the fury of those enemies which
“ thy phrensy shall have made thee. The
“ gods can effect nothing against my irre-
“ vocable decrees, which will, that man
“ shall irritate himself against the cause of
“ his sorrows.”

In

In short, every thing would make known to rational princes, that they have no occasion for heaven, to be faithfully obeyed on earth; that all the powers of heaven, will not sustain them, when they shall act the tyrant, that their true friends are those who undeceive the people of their delusion; that their real enemies are those who intoxicate them with flattery, who harden them in crime, who make the road to heaven easy for them; who feed them with chimeras, suitable to draw them aside from those cares and those sentiments which they owe to nations*.

It is, then, I repeat it, only by reconducting men to nature, that we can procure them evident notions, and certain knowledge; it is only by shewing them their true relations with each other, that we can place them on the road to happiness. The human mind, blinded by its theology, has scarcely advanced a single step. Man's

* *Al gene'em cereris, sine cæde et vulnere pauci.*

Defecunt reges et fixa morte tyranni.

JUVENAL SAT. XV. 110.

religious

religious systems have rendered him dubious of the most demonstrable truths of every kind. Superstition influenced every thing, and served to corrupt all. Philosophy guided by it, was no longer any thing more than an imaginary science : it quitted the real world, to throw itself into the ideal world of metaphysics ; it neglected nature, to occupy itself with gods, with spirits, with invisible powers, which only served to render all questions more obscure and more complicated. In all difficulties, they brought in the divinity, and from thence things only became more and more perplexed, nothing could be explained. Theological notions appear to have been invented only to put man's reason to flight, to confound his judgment, to deceive his mind, to overturn all his clearest ideas of every science. In the hands of the theologians, LOGIC, or the art of reasoning, was nothing more than an unintelligible jargon, calculated to support sophism and falsehood, and to prove the most palpable contradictions. MORALITY became, as we have seen, uncertain and wavering, because
it

it was founded on an ideal being, who ~~was~~ never in accord with himself; his goodness, his justice, his moral qualities, his useful precepts, were each moment contradicted by an iniquitous conduct, and the most barbarous commands. POLITICS, as we have said, were perverted, by the false ideas which were given to sovereigns of their rights. JURISPRUDENCE and the laws were submitted to the caprice of religion, who put shackles on the labour, the commerce, the industry, the activity of nations. Every thing was sacrificed to the interests of the theologians; for every science, they only taught obscure and quarrelsome metaphysics, which, hundreds of times, caused the blood of those people to flow, who were incapable of understanding it.

Born an enemy to experience, theology, that *supernatural* science, was an invincible obstacle to the progress of the natural sciences, as it almost always threw itself in their way. It was not permitted for natural philosophy, for natural history, for anatomy, to see any thing, but through the medium of the jaundiced eyes of superstition.

stitution. The most evident facts were rejected with disdain, and proscribed with horror, whenever they could not be made to square with the hypotheses of religion *. In short, theology unceasingly opposed itself to the happiness of nations, to the progress of the human mind, to useful researches, to the liberty of thought: it kept man in ignorance, all his steps, guided by it, were no more than errors. Is it resolving a question in natural philosophy, to say that an effect which surprizes us, that an unusual phænomenon, that a volcano, a deluge, a comet, &c. are signs of the divine wrath, or works contrary to the

* VIRGIL, the bishop of SALTZBURG, was condemned by the church, for having dared to maintain the existence of the antipodes. All the world are acquainted with the persecutions which GALILÆUS suffered for pretending that the SUN did not make its revolution round the EARTH. DESCARTES was obliged to die in a foreign land. Priests have a right to be enemies to the sciences; the progress of reason will annihilate, sooner or later, superstitious ideas. Nothing that is founded on NATURE and on TRUTH, can ever be lost, the works of the imagination and of imposture must be overturned first or last.

laws of nature? In persuading nations, as it has done, that all the calamities, whether physical or moral, which they experience, are the effects of the will of God, or chastisements, which his power inflicts on them, is it not preventing them to seek after remedies for these evils*? Would it not have been more useful, to have studied the
nature

* In the year 1725, the CITY OF PARIS was afflicted with a scarcity, which it was thought would cause an insurrection of the people, they brought down the shrine of ST. GENEVIEVE, the patroness or tutelary goddess of the Parisians, and it was carried in procession, to cause this calamity to cease, which was brought on by monopolies, in which the mistress of the then prime minister was interested.

In the year 1795, ENGLAND was afflicted with a scarcity, brought on by an illjudged war against the FRENCH PEOPLE, for having thrown off the tyranny of their monarchy, in which contest immense quantities of grain and other provisions were destroyed, to prevent them falling into the hands of the French republicans, and also by the dismemberment of POLAND, the granary of Europe, by the KING OF PRUSSIA and the EMPRESS of RUSSIA, whose troops laid waste every thing they came near, because a general, named KOSCIUSKO, of the most exemplary courage, had, with a chosen body of
brave

nature of things, and to seek in nature herself, or in human industry, for succours against those sorrows, with which mortals

brave Poles, endeavoured, though vainly, to prevent this cruel injustice, by opposing force to force.—This alarming scarcity, induced a meeting, at the LONDON TAVERN in LONDON, to consider of means to alleviate the distresses of the English people, which proved as fruitless as the opposition of the Poles to these crowned robbers.—At this meeting, a DOCTOR VINCENT, a Christian priest, and the then master of Westminster school, made a grave and solemn speech, in which he attributed the whole calamity to the chastisement of God, for the sins of the people.

The name of this God is always made use of by wicked and abandoned chiefs, to cover their own iniquities, and screen themselves from the resentment of the people, the priests, those pests to society, who are immediately interested in their peculations and oppressions, always maintain the doctrine of these cunning knaves, and the ignorance of the citizens suffers these fables to pass for incontestable truths: it is thus that KING-CRAFT and PRIEST-CRAFT, in uniting their forces, always keep men in a state of degrading slavery, never suffering the bandeau of delusion to be removed from before their eyes, by decreeing, in the name of God, the most cruel punishments against those who attempt to throw the light of day on the secret caverns of imposition and despotism.

are afflicted, than to attribute the evil, which man experiences, to an unknown power, against whose will it cannot be supposed there is any relief? The study of nature, the search after truth, elevates the soul, expands the genius, is calculated to render man active and courageous; theological notions, appear to have been made to debase him, to contract his mind, to plunge him in despondence*. In the place of attributing to the divine vengeance those wars, those famines, those sterilities, those contagions, and that multitude of calamities which desolate the people, would it not have been more useful and more consistent with truth, to have shewn them that these evils were to be ascribed to their own folly, or rather to the passions, to the want of energy, to the tyranny of their princes, who sacrifice nations to their frightful delirium? These irrational people, in the place of amusing

** Non enim aliunde venit animo robur, quam a bonis artibus, quam a contemplatione naturæ.*

SENEC. QUÆST. NATUR. LIB. VI. CHAP. XXXII.

themselves

themselves with expiations for their pretended crimes, and seeking to render themselves acceptable to imaginary powers, should they not have sought, in a more rational administration, the true means of avoiding those scourges of which they were the victims? Natural evils, demand natural remedies: ought not experience long since to have convinced mortals, of the inefficacy of supernatural remedies, of expiations, of prayers, of sacrifices, of fasting, of processions, &c. which all the people of the earth have vainly opposed to the disasters which they experienced?

Let us, then, conclude, that theology and its notions, far from being useful to the human species, are the true sources of all those sorrows which afflict the earth, of those errors, by which men are blinded, of those prejudices which benumb them, of that ignorance which renders them credulous, of those vices which torment them, of those governments which oppress them. Let us, then, conclude, that those divine and supernatural ideas with which

we

we are inspired from our infancy, are the true causes of our habitual folly, of our religious quarrels, of our sacred dissensions, of our inhuman persecutions. Let us, at length, acknowledge, that they are these fatal ideas which have obscured morality, corrupted politics, retarded the progress of the sciences, even annihilated happiness and peace in the heart of man. Let it, then, be no longer dissimulated, that all those calamities, for which man turns his eyes, drowned in tears, towards heaven, are to be ascribed to those vain phantoms which his imagination has placed there; let him cease to implore them; let him seek in nature, and in his own energy, those resources, which the gods, who are deaf to his cries, will never procure for him. Let him consult the desires of his heart, and he will know that which he oweth to himself, and that which he oweth to others: let him examine the essence and the aim of society, and he will no longer be a slave; let him consult experience, he will find truth, and he will acknowledge
that

that error never can possibly render him happy*.

* The author of the BOOK OF WISDOM, hath said with reason, *infandorum e. a. m. idolorum cultura, om. is mali est causa et initium et finis.* See CHAP. XXV. VERS. 27. He did not see that his god was an idol more prejudicial than all the others. As for the rest, it appears that the dangers of superstition have been felt by all those who have sincerely taken to heart the interests of the human species. Here, without doubt, is the reason why PHILOSOPHY, which is the fruit of reflection, was almost always at open war with RELIGION, which, as we have shewn, is itself the fruit of IGNORANCE, of IMPOSITION, of ENTHUSIASM, and of IMAGINATION.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

MEN CAN FORM NO CONCLUSION FROM THE IDEAS WHICH ARE GIVEN THEM OF THE DIVINITY: OF THE WANT OF JUST INFERENCE IN, AND OF THE INUTILITY OF, THEIR CONDUCT ON HIS ACCOUNT.

IF, as we have proved, the false ideas that men have in all times formed to themselves of the divinity, far from being of utility, are prejudicial to morality, to politics, to the happiness of society, and the members who compose it, in short, to the progress of the human understanding; reason and our interest ought to make us feel the necessity of banishing from our mind these vain and futile opinions, which will never be suitable, but to confound it, and disturb the tranquillity of our hearts. In vain we should flatter ourselves with arriving at the rectification of theological notions; false in their principles, they are

not susceptible of reform. Under whatever shape an error presents itself, as soon as men shall attach a great importance to it, it will finish, sooner or later, by having for them consequences as extensive as dangerous. Besides, the inutility of the researches which in all ages have been made after the divinity, of whom the notions have never had any other effect than to obscure him more and more, even for those themselves who have most meditated upon him—this inutility, I say, ought it not to convince us, that these notions are not within the reach of our capacity, and that this imaginary being will not be better known by us, or by our descendants, than it hath been by our ancestors, either the most savage or the most ignorant? The object which men, in all ages, have the most considered, reasoned upon the most, written upon the most, nevertheless remains the least known; on the contrary, time hath only rendered it more impossible to be conceived. If God be such as modern theology depicts him to us, he must be himself a God who is capable of forming

an idea of him *. We know little of man, we hardly know ourselves and our faculties, and we are disposed to reason upon a being inaccessible to all our senses! Let us, then, travel over in peace the line described for us by nature, without diverging from it, to run after chimeras; let us occupy ourselves with our true happiness; let us profit of the benefits which are spread before us; let us labour to multiply them, by diminishing the number of our errors; let us submit to those evils, which we cannot avoid; and do not let us augment them, by filling our mind with prejudices fuitable to lead it astray. When we shall reflect on it, every thing will clearly prove to us, that the pretended science of god, is, in truth, nothing but a presumptuous ignorance, masked under pompous and unintelligible words. In short,

* A modern poet has composed a piece of poetry, that received the sanction of the French academy, upon the ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, in which the following line was particularly applauded:

"To say what he is, 'twere needful to be himself."

let

let us terminate unfruitful researches, let us, at least, acknowledge our invincible ignorance; it will be more advantageous to us, than an arrogant science, which hitherto hath done nothing more than sow discord on the earth, and affliction in our hearts.

In supposing a sovereign intelligence, who governs the world; in supposing a god, who exacts from his creatures that they should know him, that they should be convinced of his existence, of his wisdom, of his power, and who is desirous they should render him homage, it must be allowed, that no man on the earth completely fulfils in this respect the views of providence. Indeed nothing is more demonstrable, than the impossibility in which the theologians find themselves to form to their mind any idea whatever of their divinity*. The weakness and the obscurity
of

* PROCOPIUS, the first BISHOP of the GOTHs, says, in a very solemn manner, *"I esteem it a very foolish temerity, to be disposed to penetrate into the knowledge of the nature of God,"* And farther on, he acknow-

of the proofs which they give of his existence; the contradictions into which they fall; the sophisms and the begging of principles which they employ, evidently prove to us, that they are very frequently in the greatest incertitude upon the nature of the being with whom it is their profession to occupy themselves. But, granting that they have a knowledge of him, that his existence, his essence, and his attributes were so fully demonstrated to them, as to leave no one doubt in their mind, do the rest of the human beings enjoy the same advantage? Ingenuously, how many persons will be found in the world, who have the leisure, the capacity, the penetration necessary to understand what is meant to be designated under the name of an immaterial being, of a pure spirit, who moveth matter, without being matter himself; who is the motive-power of nature, without being

ledges, *"that he has nothing more to say of him, except
 " that he is perfectly good. Him who knoweth more, whether
 " he be ecclesiastic or layman, has only to tell it."*

contained

contained in nature, and without being able to touch it? Are there, in the most religious societies, many persons who are in a state to follow their spiritual guides in those subtle proofs which they give them of the existence of the god which they make them adore?

Very few men, without doubt, are capable of a profound and connected meditation; the exercise of thought is, for the greater part, amongst them a labour as painful as it is unusual. The people, obliged to labour hard, in order to subsist, are commonly incapable of reflection. Nobles, men of the world, women, and young people occupied with their own affairs, with the care of gratifying their passions, of procuring themselves pleasure, think as rarely as the uninformed. There are not, perhaps, two men in an hundred thousand, who have seriously asked themselves the question, what it is they understand by the word GOD? whilst it is extremely rare to find persons to whom the existence of God is a problem: nevertheless, as we have said, conviction supposes that evidence which can alone pro-

cure certitude to the mind. Where, then, are the men who are convinced of the existence of their god? Who are those, in whom we shall find the complete certitude of this pretended truth, so important to all? Who are the persons who have given themselves an account of the ideas which they have formed to themselves upon the divinity, upon his attributes, upon his essence? Alas! I see in the whole world only some speculators, who, by dint of occupying themselves with him, have foolishly believed they have discovered something in the confused and unconnected ideas of their imagination; they have endeavoured to form a whole, which, chimerical as it is, they have accustomed themselves to consider as really existing: by dint of musing upon it, they have sometimes persuaded themselves that they saw it distinctly, and they have attained to the making others believe it, who have not mused quite so much as themselves.

It is never more than upon hearsay, that the mass of the people adore the god of their fathers and their priests: authority, confidence,

confidence, submission, and habit, take place of conviction and proofs in them; they prostrate themselves, and pray, because their fathers have taught them to fall down and worship; but wherefore have these fallen upon their knees? It is because, in times far distant, their legislators and their guides have imposed it on them as a duty. "Adore and believe," have they been told, "those gods, whom ye cannot comprehend; yield yourselves in this respect to our profound wisdom; we know more than you about the divinity." But wherefore should I take this matter on your authority? It is because God willeth it thus; it is because God will punish you, if you dare resist. But is not this god the thing in question? Nevertheless, men have always satisfied themselves with this circle of errors; the idleness of their mind made them find it most easy to yield themselves to the judgment of others. All religious notions are uniformly founded on authority; all the religions of the world forbid examination, and are not disposed that men should reason
upon

upon them ; it is authority that wills they should believe in God ; this god is himself founded only upon the authority of some men, who pretend to have a knowledge of him, and to be sent, on his part, to announce him to the earth. A god made by men, hath, without doubt, occasion for men to make him known to men *.

Is

* Men are always as credulous as children, upon those objects which relate to religion ; as they comprehend nothing about it, and are nevertheless told that they must believe it, they imagine they run no risque in joining sentiments with their priests, whom they suppose to have been able to discover that which they do not themselves understand. The most rational people say to themselves, *what shall I do ? what interest can so many people have to deceive ?* I say to them, they do deceive you, either because they are themselves deceived, or because they have a great interest in deceiving you.

By the confession of the theologians themselves, men are without RELIGION : they have only SUPERSTITION. Superstition, according to them, *is a worship of the divinity badly understood and irrational, or else, a worship rendered to a false divinity.* But where are the people or the clergy, who will allow that their divinity is false, and their worship irrational ? How shall

Is it not, then, for the priests, the inspired, the metaphysicians, that the conviction of the existence of a god would be reserved, which is nevertheless said to be so necessary for the whole human species? But shall we find any harmony among the theological notions of the different inspired men, or those thinkers who are scattered over the earth? Those themselves, who make a profession of adoring the same god, are they in accord with respect to him? Are they contented with the proofs which their colleagues bring of his existence? Do they unanimously subscribe to the ideas which they present upon his nature, upon his conduct, upon the manner of under-

shall it be decided, who is right, or who is wrong? It is evident, that in this affair, all men are equally wrong. Indeed, BUDDÆUS, in his TREATISE ON ATHEISM, tells us, *in order that a religion may be true, not only the object of the worship must be true, but we must also have a just idea of it. He, then, who adoreth God, without knowing him, adoreth him in a perverse and corrupt manner, and is guilty of superstition.* This granted, could it not be demanded of all the theologians in the world, if they can boast of having a JUST IDEA, or a real knowledge of the divinity?

standing his various oracles? Is there one country on the earth, where the science of god is really perfectioned? Has this science obtained any degree of that consistency and uniformity which we see attached to human knowledge, to the most futile arts, to those trades which are most despised? The words SPIRIT, IMMATERIALITY, CREATION, PREDESTINATION, GRACE; this multitude of subtile distinctions, with which theology is throughout filled in some countries; these inventions, so ingenious, imagined by those thinkers who have succeeded each other, during so many ages, have done no more, alas! than perplex things; and hitherto the science, the most necessary to man, has never been able to acquire the least degree of fixity. For thousands of years past, these idle dreamers have been perpetually relieving each other to meditate on the divinity, to divine his concealed ways, to invent hypotheses suitable to develop this important ænigma. Their small success has not at all discouraged the theological vanity; they have always
spoken

spoken of God ; they have disputed, they have cut each others' throats for him ; and this sublime being nevertheless remains the most unknown and the most examined*.

Men would have been too happy, if, confining themselves to those visible objects which interest them, they had employed in perfecting their real sciences, their laws, their morals, and their education, half those efforts which they have wasted in their researches after the divinity. They

* If things were coolly examined, it would be acknowledged, that religion is by no means formed for the greater part of mankind, who are utterly incapable of comprehending any of those aerial subtilities upon which it rests. Who is the man that understandeth any thing of the fundamental principles of his religion ; of the SPIRITUALITY of God ; of the IMMATERIALITY of the soul ; of the MYSTERIES, of which he is told every day ? Are there many people who can boast of perfectly understanding the state of the question in those theological speculations, which have frequently the power of disturbing the repose of mankind ? Nevertheless, even the women believe themselves obliged to take a part in the quarrels excited by idle contemplators, who are of less utility to society, than the meanest artizan.

would have been also much wiser, and more fortunate, if they had agreed to let their idle and unemployed guides quarrel between themselves, and fathom those depths suitable to stun and amaze them, without intermeddling with their irrational disputes. But it is the essence of ignorance, to attach importance to every thing which it doth not understand. Human vanity makes the mind bear up against difficulties. The more an object eludes our enquiry, the more efforts we make to compass it, because, from thence, our pride is spurred on, our curiosity is irritated, and it appears interesting to us. On the other hand, the longer and more laborious our researches have been, the more importance we attach to our real or pretended discoveries, the more we are desirous not to have lost our time, and we are always ready to defend warmly the goodness of our judgment. Do not let us, then, be surprized at the interest which ignorant people have at all times taken in the discoveries of their priests; nor at the obstinacy which these have always shewn in their disputes.

Indeed,

Indeed, in combatting for his god, each fought only for the interests of his own vanity, which of all human passions, is the most quickly alarmed, and the most suitable to produce very great follies.

If, throwing aside, for a moment, the fatal ideas which theology gives us of a capricious god, whose partial and despotic decrees decide the condition of human beings, we would only fix our eyes upon his pretended goodness, which all men, even when trembling before this god, are in accord to give him: if we suppose him to have the object which they have ascribed to him, to have laboured only to his own glory, to exact the homage of intelligent beings; to seek in all his works only the well-being of the human species; how can we reconcile his views and his dispositions with the ignorance, truly invincible, in which this god, so glorious and so good, leaves the greater part of mankind with respect to him? If God is desirous to be known, cherished, thanked, wherefore doth he not shew himself, under favourable traits, to all those intelligent beings, by whom he
would

would be loved and adored? Wherefore doth he not manifest himself to all the earth, in an unequivocal manner, much more capable of convincing us than those particular revelations, which appear to accuse the divinity of a fatal partiality for some of his creatures? The omnipotent, hath he not then more evident means of shewing himself to men, than those ridiculous metamorphoses, those pretended incarnations, which are attested to us by writers so little in harmony with each other in the recitals which they make? In the place of such a number of miracles, invented to prove the divine mission of so many legislators held in reverence by the different people of the world, could not the sovereign of minds have convinced at once the human mind of those things, with which he was desirous it should be acquainted? In the room of suspending a sun in the vaulted firmament; in the place of diffusing without order the stars and constellations, which fill up the regions of space; would it not have been more conformable to the views of a god, so jealous
of

of his glory, and so well intentioned towards man, to have wrote in a manner not liable to dispute, his name, his attributes, his everlasting will, in indelible characters, and equally legible to all the inhabitants of the earth*? No one, then, would have been able to doubt the existence of a god, of his manifest will, of his visible intentions; no mortal would have dared to place himself in a situation of attracting his wrath; in short, no man would have had the audacity to have imposed on men in his name, or to have interpreted his will, according to his own whim and caprice.

Theology is truly the **VESSEL OF THE DANAIDES**. By dint of contradictory qua-

* I foresee that the theologians will oppose to this passage, their *cæli narrant gloriam Dei*. But we shall reply to them, that the heavens prove nothing, except the power of nature, the immutability of its laws, the power of attraction, of repulsion, of gravitation, the energy of matter; and that the heavens in no way announce the existence of an immaterial cause, of a god who is in contradiction with himself, and who can never do that which he is disposed to do.

lities

lities and bold assertions, it has, to say thus, so shackled its god, as to make it impossible for him to act. Indeed, when even we should suppose the existence of the theological god, and the reality of those attributes, so discordant, which are given him, we can conclude nothing from them, to authorize the conduct, or the worships which are prescribed to be rendered to him. If he be infinitely good, what reason shall we have to fear him? If he be infinitely wise, wherefore disturb ourselves upon our condition? If he be omniscient, wherefore inform him of our wants, and fatigue him with our prayers? If he be omnipresent, wherefore erect temples to him? If he be lord of all, wherefore make sacrifices and offerings to him? If he be just, wherefore believe that he punishes those creatures, whom he hath filled with imbecility? If his grace worketh every thing in man, what reason hath he to reward him? If he be omnipotent, how can he be offended; how can we resist him? If he be rational, how can he enrage himself against these blind mortals, to

whom he hath left the liberty of acting irrationally? If he be immutable, by what right shall we pretend to make him change his decrees? If he be inconceivable, wherefore should we occupy ourselves with him? If he hath spoken, wherefore is the universe not convinced? If the knowledge of a god be the most necessary thing, wherefore is it not more evident and more manifest?

But, on the other hand, the theological god hath two faces. Nevertheless, if he be wrathful, jealous, vindictive, and wicked, as theology supposes him to be, without being disposed to allow it, we shall not any longer be authorized to address our prayers to him, nor to sorrowfully occupy ourselves with his idea. On the contrary, for our present happiness, and for our quiet, we ought to make a point of banishing him from our thoughts; we ought to place him in the rank of those necessary evils, which are only aggravated by the consideration of them. Indeed, if God be a tyrant, how should it be possible to love him? Affection and tenderness, are they

not sentiments incompatible with an habitual fear? How could we experience love for a master, who giveth to his slaves the liberty of offending him, to the end that he may take them on their weak side, and punish them with the utmost barbarity? If to this odious character, God also joineth omnipotence; if he holdeth in his hands the unhappy playthings of his fantastic cruelty, what can we conclude from it? Nothing; save that, whatever efforts we may be able to make to escape our destiny, we shall always be incapacitated to withdraw ourselves from it. If a god, cruel or wicked by his nature, be armed with infinite power, and taketh pleasure in rendering us eternally miserable, nothing will be able to divert him from it; his wickedness will always pursue its course; his malice would, without doubt, prevent him from paying any attention to our cries; nothing would be able to soften his obdurate heart.

Thus, under whatever point of view we contemplate the theological god, we have no worship to render him, no prayers to offer

offer up to him. If he be perfectly good, intelligent, equitable, and wise, what have we to ask of him? If he be sovereignly wicked, if he be gratuitously cruel, as all men believe, without daring to avow it, our evils are without remedy; such a god would deride our prayers, and, sooner or later, we should be obliged to submit to the rigour of the lot which he has destined for us.

This granted, he who can undeceive himself of the afflicting notions of the divinity, hath this advantage over the credulous and trembling superstitious mortal, that he establishes in his heart a momentary tranquillity, which, at least, rendereth him happy in this life. If the study of nature hath banished from him those chimeras with which the superstitious man is infested, he enjoys a security of which this fees himself deprived. In consulting this nature, his fears are dissipated, his opinions, true or false, become steady; and a calm succeeds the storm, which panic terrors and wavering notions excite in the hearts of all men who occupy themselves with the divinity.

If the human soul, cheered by philosophy, had the boldness to consider things coolly, it would no longer behold the universe governed by an implacable tyrant, always ready to strike. If he were rational, he would see, that, in committing evil, he did not disturb nature; that he did not outrage his author; he injureth himself alone, or he injures other beings, capable of feeling the effects of his conduct; from thence, he knows the line of his duties; he prefers virtue to vice, and for his own permanent repose, satisfaction, and felicity in this world, he feels himself interested in the practice of virtue, in rendering it habitual to his heart, in avoiding vice, in detesting crime, during the whole time of his abode amongst intelligent and sensible beings, from whom he expects his happiness. In attaching himself to these rules, he will live in content with himself, and be cherished by those who shall be capable of experiencing the influence of his actions; he will expect, without inquietude, the term when his existence shall have a period; he will have no reason to dread the existence which shall

shall follow the one he at present enjoys ; he will not fear to be deceived in his reasonings ; guided by demonstration and honesty, he will perceive, that, if, contrary to his expectation, there did exist a good god, he would not punish him for his involuntary errors, which would depend upon the organization which he should have received.

Indeed, if there did exist a god ; if God were a being full of reason, equity, goodness, and not a ferocious, irrational, malicious genius, such as religion is pleased so frequently to depict him ; what could a virtuous atheist have to apprehend, who believing at the moment of his death he falls asleep for ever, should find himself in the presence of a god, whom he should have mistaken and neglected during his life ?

“ O God,” would he say, “ father, who
“ hath rendered thyself invisible to thy
“ child ! Author inconceivable and hid-
“ den, whom I could not discover ! par-
“ don me, if my limited understanding
“ hath not been able to know thee, in
“ a nature

“ a nature where every thing hath appear-
“ ed to me to be necessary! Excuse me,
“ if my sensible heart hath not discerned
“ thine august traits, under those of the
“ austere tyrant whom superstitious mor-
“ tals tremblingly adore. I could only see
“ a true phantom, in that assemblage of
“ irreconcilable qualities, with which the
“ imagination had clothed thee. How
“ should my coarse eyes perceive thee in
“ a nature in which all my senses have never
“ been able to know but material beings
“ and perishable forms? Could I, by the
“ aid of these senses, discover thy spiritual
“ essence, of which they could not furnish
“ any proof? How should I find the in-
“ variable demonstration of thy goodness
“ in thy works, which I saw as frequently
“ prejudicial as favourable to the beings
“ of my species? My feeble brain, obliged
“ to form its judgments after its own ca-
“ pacity, could it judge of thy plan, of thy
“ wisdom, of thine intelligence, whilst the
“ universe presented to me only a continued
“ mixture of order and confusion, of good
“ and evil, of formation and destruction?

“ Have I been able to render homage to
“ thy justice, whilst I so frequently saw
“ crime triumphant, and virtue in tears?
“ Could I, then, acknowledge the voice
“ of a being filled with wisdom, in those
“ ambiguous, contradictory, and puerile
“ oracles which impostors published in thy
“ name, in the different countries of the
“ earth which I have quitted? If I have
“ refused to believe thine existence, it is
“ because I have not known, either what
“ thou couldst be, or where thou couldst
“ be placed, or the qualities which could
“ be assigned to thee. Mine ignorance is
“ excusable, because it was invincible: my
“ mind could not bend itself under the
“ authority of some men, who acknow-
“ ledged themselves as little enlightened
“ upon thine essence as myself, and who,
“ for ever disputing amongst themselves,
“ were in harmony only in imperiously
“ crying out to me to sacrifice to them
“ that reason which thou hadst given me.
“ But, O God! if thou cherishest thy
“ creatures, I also have cherished them
“ like thee; I have endeavoured to render
“ them

“ them happy in the sphere in which I
“ have lived. If thou art the author of
“ reason, I have always listened to it
“ and followed it ; if virtue pleaseth thee,
“ mine heart hath always honoured it ; I
“ have never outraged it ; and, when my
“ powers have permitted me, I have my-
“ self practised it ; I was an affectionate
“ husband, a tender father, a sincere friend,
“ a faithful and zealous citizen. I have held
“ out consolation to the afflicted : if the
“ foibles of my nature have been in-
“ jurious to myself, or incommodious to
“ others, I have not, at least, made the
“ unfortunate groan under the weight of
“ my injustice ; I have not devoured the
“ substance of the poor ; I have not
“ seen without pity the widow’s tears ; I
“ have not heard without commiseration
“ the cries of the orphan. If thou didst
“ render man sociable, if thou wast dis-
“ posed that society might subsist and be
“ happy, I have been the enemy of all
“ those who oppressed him, or deceived
“ him, that they might take advantage of his
“ misfortunes.

“ If

“ If I have thought amiss of thee, it is
“ because my understanding could not
“ conceive thee ; if I have spoken ill of
“ thee, it is because mine heart, partaking
“ too much of human nature, revolted
“ against the odious portrait which was
“ painted of thee. My wanderings have
“ been the effect of the temperament
“ which thou hast given me ; of the cir-
“ cumstances, in which, without my con-
“ sent, thou hast placed me ; of those ideas,
“ which, in despite of me, have entered into
“ my mind. If thou art good and just,
“ as we are assured thou art, thou canst
“ not punish me for the wanderings of
“ mine imagination, for faults caused by
“ my passions, which are the necessary
“ consequence of the organization which
“ I have received from thee. Thus, I can-
“ not fear thee, I cannot dread the con-
“ dition which thou preparest for me.
“ Thy goodness cannot have permitted
“ that I should incur punishment for in-
“ evitable errors. Wherefore didst thou
“ not rather prevent my being born,
“ than have called me into the rank

“ of intelligent beings, there to enjoy
“ the fatal liberty of rendering myself un-
“ happy? If thou punishest me with se-
“ verity and eternally, for having listened to
“ the reason which thou gavest me; if thou
“ correctest me for mine illusions; if thou
“ enragest thyself, because my feebleness
“ hath made me fall into those snares,
“ which thou hast every where spread for
“ me; thou wilt be the most cruel and
“ the most unjust of tyrants; thou wilt not
“ be a god, but a malicious dæmon, of
“ whom I shall be obliged to yield to the
“ law, and satiate the barbarity; but of
“ whom, I shall, at least, congratulate my-
“ self, to have for some time shook off the
“ insupportable yoke.”

It is thus, that a disciple of nature would be able to speak, who, transported all at once, into the imaginary regions, should there find a god, of whom all the ideas were in direct contradiction to those which wisdom, goodness, justice, furnish us here below. Indeed, theology appears to have been invented only to overturn in our mind all the natural ideas. This illusory science,
seems

seems to be bent on making its god a being the most contradictory to human reason. It is, nevertheless, according to this reason, that we are obliged to judge in this world; if in the other, nothing is conformable to this, nothing is of more inutility, than to think of it, or reason upon it. Besides, wherefore shall we leave it to the judgment of men, who are themselves only enabled to judge like us?

However it may be, in supposing God the author of all, nothing is more ridiculous, than the idea of pleasing him, or irritating him by our actions, our thoughts, our words; nothing is more inconclusive, than to imagine that man, the work of his hands, can have merits or demerits with respect to him. It is evident that he cannot injure an omnipotent being, supremely happy by his essence. It is evident that he cannot displease him, who hath made him what he is; his passions, his desires, his propensities, are the necessary consequence of the organization which he has received; the motives which determine his will towards good or evil, are

evidently due to qualities inherent to the beings which God places around him. If it be an intelligent being, who hath placed us in the circumstances in which we are, who hath given the properties to those causes, which, in acting upon us, modify our will, how can we offend him? If I have a tender, sensible, and compassionate soul, it is because I have received from God organs easily moved, from whence results a lively imagination, which education hath cultivated. If I am insensible and cruel, it is because he hath given me only refractory organs, from whence results an imagination of little feeling, a heart difficult to be touched. If I profess a religion, it is because I have received it from parents from whom it did not depend upon me that I received my birth, who professed it before me, of whom the authority, the example, and the instructions, have obliged my mind to conform itself to their's. If I am incredulous, it is because but little susceptible of fear or enthusiasm for unknown objects, my circumstances have so ordered it, that I should
undeceive

undeceive myself of the chimeras with which I had occupied myself in mine infancy.

It is, then, for want of reflecting on his principles, that the theologian tells us that man can please or displease the the powerful God who hath formed him. Those who believe they have merited well; or deserved punishment of their god, imagine that this being will be obliged to them for the organization which he hath himself given them, and will punish them for that which he hath refused them. In consequence of this idea, so extravagant, the affectionate and tender devotee flatters himself he shall be recompenced for the warmth of his imagination. The zealous devotee doubts not that his god will some day reward him for the acrimony of his bile, or the heat of his blood. Penitent, frantic, and atrabilious beings, imagine, that God will keep a register of those follies, which their vicious organization or their fanaticism make them commit, and above all will be extremely contented with the melancholy of their humour, the gravity of their countenance, their antipathy to pleasure.

sure. Devotees, zealous, obstinate, and quarrelsome beings, cannot persuade themselves that their god, which they always form after their own model, can be favourable to those who are more phlegmatic, who have less bile in their composition, or have a cooler blood circulating through their veins. Each mortal believes his own organization is the best and the most conformable to that of his god.

What strange ideas must these blind mortals have of their divinity, who imagine that the absolute master of all can be offended with the motions which take place in their body or in their mind! What contradiction, to think that his unalterable happiness can be disturbed, or his plan deranged by the transitory shocks which the imperceptible fibres of the brain of one of his creatures experience. Theology gives us very ignoble ideas of a god, of whom, however, it is unceasingly exalting the power, the greatness, and the goodness.

Without a very marked derangement of our organs, our sentiments hardly ever
vary

vary upon those objects which our senses, experience, and reason, have clearly demonstrated to us. In whatever circumstances we are found, we have no doubt, either upon the whiteness of snow, the light of day, or the utility of virtue. It is not so with those objects which depend solely on our imagination, and which are not proved to us by the constant evidence of our senses; we judge of them variously, according to the disposition in which we find ourselves. These dispositions vary by reason of the involuntary expressions which our organs receive at each instant on the part of an infinity of causes, either exterior to us, or contained within our own machine. These organs are, without our knowledge, perpetually modified, relaxed, or bent, by the more or less weight or elasticity in the air, by heat or cold, by dryness or humidity, by health or sickness, by the heat of the blood, by the abundance of the bile, by the state of the nervous system, &c. These different causes necessarily have an influence on the momentary ideas, thoughts, and opinions, of man. He is, consequently,

consequently, obliged to see variously those objects which his imagination presents to him, without being able to be corrected by experience and memory. Here is the reason why man is obliged continually to see his god and his religious chimeras, under different aspects. In a moment when his fibres find themselves disposed to tremble, he will be cowardly and pusillanimous, he will think of this god only with trembling; in a moment when these same fibres shall be more firm, he will contemplate this same god with more coolness. The theologian, or the priest, will call his pusillanimity, INWARD FEELING, WARNING FROM HEAVEN, SECRET INSPIRATION; but he who knoweth man, will say that this is nothing but a mechanical motion, produced by a physical or natural cause. Indeed, it is by a pure physical mechanism that we can explain all the revolutions which take place frequently from one minute to another in the systems, in all the opinions, in all the judgments of men: in consequence, we see them sometimes reasoning justly, and sometimes irrationally.

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Here is the mode, by which, without recurring to grace, to inspirations, to visions, to supernatural motions, we can render ourselves an account of that uncertain and wavering state, into which we sometimes see persons fall, otherwise extremely enlightened, when there is a question of religion. Frequently, in despite of all reasoning, momentary dispositions reconduct them to the prejudices of their infancy, of which on other occasions they appear to us to be completely undeceived. These changes are very marked, especially in infirmities and sickness, and at the approach of death. The barometer of the understanding is then frequently obliged to fall. Those chimeras which they despised, or which, in a state of health, they set down at their true value, are then realized. They tremble, because the machine is enfeebled; they are irrational, because the brain is incapable of exactly fulfilling its functions. It is evident that these are the true causes of those changes which the priests have the knavery to make use of against incredulity, and from which they

draw proofs of the reality of their sublime opinions. Those **CONVERSIONS**, or those changes, which take place in the ideas of men, have always their origin in some physical derangement of their machine, brought on by chagrin, or by some natural and known cause.

Submitted to the continual influence of physical causes, our systems, then, always follow the variations of our body; we reason well when our body is healthy and well constituted; we reason badly when this body is deranged; from thence our ideas disconnect themselves, we are no longer capable of associating them with precision, of finding our principles, to draw from them just inferences; the brain is shaken, and we no longer see any thing under its true point of view. It is such a man, who does not see his god in frosty weather, under the same traits as in cloudy and rainy weather; he does not contemplate him in the same manner in sorrow as in gaiety, when in company as when alone. Good sense suggests to us, that it is when the body is sound and the mind undisturbed

undisturbed by any mist, that we can reason with precision ; this state can furnish us with a general standard suitable to regulate our judgments, and even rectify our ideas, when unexpected causes should make them waver.

If the opinions of the same individual upon his god, are wavering and subject to vary, how many changes must they experience in the various beings who compose the human race ? If there do not perhaps exist two men, who see a physical object exactly under the same point of view, what much greater variety must they not have in their modes of contemplating those things which have existence only in their imagination ? What an infinity of combinations of ideas must not minds, essentially different, make to themselves, to compose an ideal being, which each moment of life must present under a different form ? It would, then, be an irrational enterprize, to attempt to prescribe to men, what they ought to think of religion and of God, which are entirely under the cognizance of the imagination, and for which, as

we have very frequently repeated, mortals will never have any common standard. To combat the religious opinions of men, is to combat with their imagination, with their organization, with their habits, which suffice to identify with their brain the most absurd and the least founded ideas. The more imagination men have, the greater enthusiasts will they be in matters of religion, and reason will be less capable of undeceiving them of their chimeras; these chimeras will become a food necessary for their ardent imagination. In fine, to combat the religious notions of men, is to combat the passion which they have for the marvellous. In despite of reason, those persons who have a lively imagination, are perpetually reconducted to those chimeras which habit renders dear to them, even when they are troublesome and fatal: they are quitted, to clothe them in their own mode. Thus a tender soul hath occasion for a god that loveth him; the happy enthusiast needeth a god who rewardeth him; the unfortunate enthusiast wants a god, who taketh part in his sorrows;

sorrows; the melancholy devotee hath occasion for a god who chagrineth him, and who maintaineth in him the trouble which has become necessary to his diseased organization. What do I say? the frantic penitent needeth a cruel god, who imposes on him an obligation to be inhuman towards himself; and the furious fanatic would believe himself unhappy, if he were deprived of a god, who ordered him to make others experience the effects of his inflamed humours and of his unruly passions.

He is, without doubt, a less dangerous enthusiast, who feeds himself with agreeable illusions, than him whose soul is tormented by odious spectres. If a virtuous and tender soul does not make ravages in society, a mind agitated by incommodious passions, cannot fail to become, sooner or later, troublesome to his fellow creatures. The god of a SOCRATES, or of a FENELON, may be suitable to souls as gentle as their's; but he cannot be, with impunity, the god of a whole nation, in which it will always be extremely rare to find men of
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their temper. The divinity, as we have frequently said, will always be for the greater portion of mortals a frightful chimera, calculated to disturb their brain, to set their passions afloat, and to render them injurious to their associates. If honest men only see their god as filled with goodness; vicious, restless, inflexible, and wicked men, will give their god their own character, and will authorize themselves, from his example, to give a free course to their own passions. Each man can see his chimera only with his own eyes; and the number of those who will paint the divinity as hideous, afflicting, and cruel, will be always greater and more to be feared, than those who describe him under seducing colours; for one mortal that this chimera can render happy, there will be thousands that it will make miserable; it will be, sooner or later, an inexhaustible source of divisions, of extravagancies, and of madness; it will disturb the mind of the ignorant, over whom impostors and fanatics will always have an influence; it will frighten the cowardly and the pusillanimous, whom their weakness

ness will incline to perfidy and cruelty ; it will make the most honest tremble, who even while practising virtue, will fear the displeasure of a fantastical and capricious god ; it will not stop the progress of the wicked, who will put it aside, in order to deliver themselves up to crime, or who will even avail themselves of this divine chimera, to justify their transgressions. In short, in the hands of tyrants, this god, who is himself a tyrant, will only serve to crush the liberty of the people, and violate, with impunity, the rights of equity. In the hands of priests, this god will be a talisman, suitable to intoxicate, blind, and subjugate equally the sovereign and the subject ; in fine, in the hands of the people, this idol will always be a two-edged weapon, with which they will give themselves the most mortal wounds.

On the other hand, the theological god, being, as we have seen, only an heap of contradictions ; being represented, in despite of his immutability, sometimes as goodness itself, sometimes as the most cruel and the most unjust of beings ; being
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besides contemplated by men, whose machines experience continual variations, this god, I say, cannot at all times appear the same to those who occupy themselves with him. Those who form to themselves the most favourable ideas of him, are frequently obliged, in despite of these, to acknowledge, that the portrait, which they paint to themselves, is not always conformable to the original. The most fervent devotees, the most prepossessed enthusiasts cannot prevent themselves from seeing the traits of their divinity change; and if they were capable of reasoning, they would feel the want of just inference in the conduct which they unceasingly hold with respect to him. Indeed, would they not see, that this conduct appeared to contradict, every moment, the marvellous perfections which they assign to their god? To pray to the divinity, is it not doubting of his wisdom, of his benevolence, of his providence, of his omniscience, of his immutability? Is it not to accuse him of neglecting his creatures, and to ask him to alter the eternal decrees of his justice, to change the invariable,

those invariable laws, which he hath himself determined? To pray to God, is it not to say to him, "O, my God, I acknowledge your wisdom, your omniscience, your infinite goodness; nevertheless you forget me; you lose sight of your creature; you are ignorant, or you feign ignorance of that which he wanteth; do you not see that I suffer from the marvellous arrangement which your wise laws have made in the universe? Nature, against your commands, actually renders mine existence painful; change, then, I pray you, the essence which your will hath given to all the beings. See that the elements, in this moment, lose in my favour their distinguishing properties; order it so, that heavy bodies shall not fall, that fire shall not burn, that the brittle frame which I have received from you, shall not suffer those shocks which it experiences every instant. Rectify, for my happiness, the plan which your infinite prudence hath marked out from all eternity." Such are very nearly the prayers which men form; such are the ridiculous

demands which they every moment make to the divinity, of whom they extol the wisdom, the intelligence, the providence, and the equity, whilst they are hardly ever contented with the effects of his divine perfections.

Men are not more consequent in the thanksgivings which they believe themselves obliged to offer him. Is it not just, say they, to thank the divinity for his kindness? Would it not be the height of ingratitude, to refuse our homage to the author of our existence, and of every thing that contributes to render it agreeable? I shall say to them, then your god acts from interest? similar to men, who, when even they are the most disinterested, expect, at least, that we should give them proofs of the impression which their kindness makes upon us. Your god, so powerful, and so great, hath he occasion that you should prove to him the sentiments of your acknowledgments? Besides, upon what do you found this gratitude? Doth he distribute his benefits equally to all men? Are the greater number among them contented

tented with their condition? you yourself, are you always satisfied with your existence? It will be answered me, without doubt, that this existence alone is the greatest of all benefits. But how can we look upon it as a signal advantage? This existence, is it not in the necessary order of things? Has it not necessarily entered into the unknown plan of your god? Doth the stone owe any thing to the architect for having judged it necessary to his building? Do you know better than this stone the concealed views of your god? If you are a thinking and sensible being, do you not find that this marvellous plan incommodes you every instant; do not even your prayers to the architect of the world prove that you are discontented? You were born without your consent; your existence is precarious; you suffer against your will; your pleasures and your sorrows do not depend upon you; you are not master of any thing; you have not the smallest conception of the plan formed by the architect of the universe whom you never cease to admire, and in which, without your consent,

you find yourself placed ; you are the continual sport of the necessity, which you deify : after having called you into life, your god obliges you to quit it. Where, then, are those great obligations which you believe you have to providence ? This same god, who gives you the breath of life, who furnishes you your wants, who conserves you, doth he not in a moment ravish from you these pretended advantages ? If you consider existence as the greatest of all benefits, the loss of this existence is it not, according to yourself, the greatest of evils ? If death and sorrow are formidable evils, do not this grief and death efface the benefit of existence, and the pleasure that can sometimes accompany it ? If your birth and your funeral, your enjoyments and your sorrows, have equally entered into the views of his providence, I see nothing that can authorize you to thank him. What can be the obligations which you have to a master, who, in despite of you, obliges you to enter into this world there to play a dangerous and unequal game, by which you may gain or lose an eternal happiness ?

They speak to us, indeed, of another life, where we are assured that man will be completely happy. But in supposing, for a moment, the existence of this other life, which has as little foundation as that of the being from whom it is expected, it were needful, at least, for man to suspend his acknowledgment, until he shall enter into this other life ; in the life of which we have a knowledge, men are much more frequently discontented than fortunate ; if God in the world which we occupy, hath not been able or willing to permit that his beloved creatures might be perfectly happy, how shall we assure ourselves that he will have the power or the disposition to render them in the end more happy than they are now ? They will then cite to us the revelations, the formal promises of the divinity, who engages to compensate his favourites for the sorrows of the present life. Let us, for an instant, admit the authenticity of these promises ; but do not these revelations themselves teach us that the divine goodness reserves eternal punishments for the greater number of men ?

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If these menaces be true, do mortals, then owe acknowledgments to a god, who, without consulting them, only giveth them their existence, that they may, with the assistance of their pretended liberty, run the risque of rendering themselves eternally miserable? Would it not have been more beneficial for them not to have existed, or at least to have existed only like stones or brutes, from whom it is supposed God exacts nothing, than to enjoy those extolled faculties, the privilege of having merits or demerits which may conduct intelligent beings to the most frightful misfortunes? In paying attention to the small number of the elect, and to the great number of the condemned, where is the man of feeling, who, if he had been the master, had consented to run the risque of eternal damnation?

Thus, under whatever point of view we contemplate the theological phantom, men, if they were consequent, even in their errors, neither owe him prayers, nor homage, nor worship, nor thanksgivings. But in matters of religion, mortals never reason; they

they only follow the impulse of their fears, of their imagination, of their temperament, of their peculiar passions, or of those of their guides, who have acquired the right of controuling their understandings. Fear hath made gods; terror unceasingly accompanies them, it is impossible to reason when we tremble. Thus men will never reason when there shall be a question of those objects of which the vague idea will ever be associated to that of terror. If a mild and honest enthusiast sees his god only as a beneficent father, the greater portion of mortals will only view him as a formidable sultan, a disagreeable tyrant, a cruel and perverse genius. Thus, this god will always be for the human race a dangerous leaven, suitable to embitter it, and put it into a fatal fermentation. If to the peaceable, humane, and moderate devotee, could be left the good god, which he has formed to himself, after his own heart, the interest of the human race demands that an idol should be overthrown, to which fear hath given birth, which is nourished by melancholy, of whom the idea and the name are only
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calculated to fill the universe with carnage and with follies.

We do not, however, flatter ourselves that reason will be all at once capable of delivering the human race from those errors, with which so many causes united have strove to poison it. The vainest of all projects would be the expectation of curing in an instant those epidemical and hereditary errors, rooted during so many ages, and continually fed and corroborated by the ignorance, the passions, the customs, the interests, the fears, and the calamities of nations, always regenerating. The ancient revolutions of the earth have brought forth its first gods, new revolutions would produce new ones, if the old ones should chance to be forgotten. Ignorant, miserable, and trembling beings, will always form to themselves gods, or else their credulity will make them receive those which imposture or fanaticism shall be disposed to announce to them.

Then do not let us propose more to ourselves, than to shew reason to those who can be able to understand it ; to present
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sent truth to those who can sustain its lustre; to undeceive those who shall not be inclined to oppose obstacles to demonstration, and who will not obstinately persist in error. Let us infuse courage into those who have not the power to break with their illusions. Let us cheer the honest man who is much more alarmed by his fears than the wicked, who, in despite of his opinions, always follows his passions; let us console the unfortunate, who groans under a load of prejudices, which he has not examined; let us dissipate the incertitude of him who doubteth, and who ingenuously seeking after truth, finds in philosophy itself only wavering opinions, but little calculated to fix his mind. Let us banish from the man of genius, the chimera which maketh him waste his time: let us wrest his gloomy phantom from the intimidated mortal, who, duped by his vain fears, becomes useless to society: let us remove from the atrabilious being, a god who afflicts him, who exasperates him, who does nothing more than kindle his choler: let us tear from the fanatic, the god who arms him with po-

niards. Let us pluck from impostors and from tyrants, a god who serves them to terrify, enslave, and despoil, the human species. In removing from honest men their formidable ideas, let us not encourage the wicked, the enemies of society; let us deprive them of those resources upon which they reckon to expiate their transgressions; to uncertain and distant terrors, which cannot stop their excesses, let us substitute those which are real and present; let them blush at seeing themselves what they are; let them tremble at finding their conspiracies discovered; let them have the fear of one day seeing those mortals whom they abuse, cured of the errors of which they avail themselves to enslave them.

If we cannot cure nations of their inveterate prejudices, let us endeavour, at least, to prevent them from again falling into those excesses, into which religion has so frequently hurried them; let men form to themselves chimeras; let them think of them as they will, provided their reveries do not make them forget they are men, and that a sociable being is not made to resemble

resemble ferocious animals. Let us balance the fictitious interests of heaven, by the sensible interests of the earth. Let sovereigns, and the people, at length acknowledge that the advantages resulting from truth, from justice, from good laws, from a rational education, from an human and peaceable morality, are much more solid than those which they so vainly expect from their divinities : let them feel that benefits so real and so precious ought not to be sacrificed to uncertain hopes, so frequently contradicted by experience. In order to convince themselves, let every rational man consider the numberless crimes which the name of God hath caused upon the earth ; let them study his frightful history, and that of his odious ministers, who have every where fanned the spirit of madness, discord, and fury. Let princes, and subjects, at least learn to sometimes resist the passions of these pretended interpreters of the divinity, especially when they shall command them in his name to be inhuman, intolerant, barbarous ; to stifle the cries of nature, the voice of equity, the remon-

frances of reason, and to shut their eyes to the interests of society.

Feeble mortals! how long will your imagination, so active and so prompt to seize on the marvellous, continue to seek, out of the universe, pretexts to make you injurious to yourselves, and to the beings with whom ye live here below? Wherefore do ye not follow in peace the simple and easy route, which your nature has marked out for ye? Wherefore strew with thorns the road of life? Wherefore multiply those sorrows to which your destiny exposes ye? What advantages can ye expect from a divinity, which the united efforts of the whole human species have not been able to make you acquainted with? Be ignorant, then, of that which the human mind is not formed to comprehend; abandon your chimeras; occupy yourselves with truth; learn the art of living happy; perfection your morals, your governments, and your laws; look to education, to agriculture, to the sciences that are truly useful; labour with ardour; oblige nature, by your industry, to become propitious to
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ye, and the gods will not be able to oppose any thing to your felicity. Leave to idle thinkers, to useless enthusiasts, the unfruitful labour of fathoming those depths from which ye ought to divert your attention; enjoy the benefits attached to your present existence; augment the number of them; never throw yourselves forward beyond your sphere. If you must have chimeras, permit your fellow-creatures to have their's also; and do not cut the throat of your brethren, when they cannot rave like yourselves. If ye will have gods, let your imagination give birth to them; but do not suffer these imaginary beings so far to intoxicate ye, as to make ye mistake that which ye owe to those real beings with whom ye live.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

DEFENCE OF THE SENTIMENTS CONTAINED IN THIS WORK. OF IMPIETY. DO THERE EXIST ATHEISTS?

WHAT has been said in the course of this Work, ought to be sufficient to undeceive those men, who are capable of reasoning on the prejudices to which they attach so much importance. But the most evident truths are obliged to prove abortive against enthusiasm, habit, and fear; nothing is more difficult than to destroy error, when long prescription has given it possession of the human mind. It is unaffailable when it is supported by general consent, propagated by education, when it has grown inveterate by custom, when it is fortified by example, maintained by authority, and unceasingly nourished by the hopes and fears of the people, who look
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upon their errors themselves as the remedy for their sorrows. Such are the united forces which sustain the empire of the gods in this world, and which appear to render their throne firm and immovable.

Do not let us, then, be surprized, to see the greater number of men cherish their blindness, and fear the truth. We every where find mortals obstinately attached to phantoms, from whom they expect their happiness, notwithstanding these phantoms are evidently the source of all their sorrows. Smitten with the marvellous, disdaining that which is simple and easy to be comprehended, but little instructed in the ways of nature, accustomed to neglect the use of their reason, the uninformed, from age to age, prostrate themselves before those invisible powers which they are made to adore. They address their most fervent prayers to them, they implore them in their misfortunes, they despoil themselves for them of the fruits of their labour, they are unceasingly occupied with thanking these vain idols, for benefits which they have not received, or
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in demanding of them favours, which they cannot obtain. Neither experience nor reflection can undeceive them ; they do not perceive, that their gods have always been deaf : they ascribe it to themselves ; they believe them to be too much irritated, they tremble, they groan, they sigh, at their feet ; they strew their altars with presents ; they do not see that these beings, so powerful, are submitted to nature, and are never propitious but when this nature is favourable. It is thus that nations are the accomplices of those who deceive them, and are as much opposed to truth, as those who lead them astray.

In matters of religion, there are very few persons who do not partake, more or less, of the opinions of the uninformed. Every man who throws aside the received ideas, is generally looked upon as a madman, a presumptuous being, who insolently believes himself much wiser than the others. At the magical names of religion and the divinity, a sudden and panic terror takes possession of men's minds ; as soon as they see them attacked, society is alarmed, each imagines that

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he already sees the cœlestial monarch lift his avenging arm against the country where rebellious nature has produced a monster with sufficient temerity to brave his wrath. Even the most moderate persons tax the man with folly and sedition, who dares contest with this imaginary sovereign, those rights which good sense has never examined. In consequence, whoever undertakes to tear the bandeau of prejudice, appears an irrational being, a dangerous citizen ; his sentence is pronounced, with a voice almost unanimous ; the public indignation, stirred up by fanaticism and imposture, renders it impossible for him to be heard ; everyone believes himself culpable, if he does not display his fury against him, and his zeal in favour of a terrible god, whose anger is supposed to be provoked. Thus, the man who consults his reason, the disciple of nature, is looked upon as a public pest ; the enemy of an injurious phantom, is regarded as the enemy of the human species ; he who would establish a lasting peace amongst men, is treated as the disturber of society ; they unanimously proscribe

him, who should be disposed to cheer and frighten mortals by breaking those idols, under which prejudice has obliged them to tremble. At the bare name of an ATHEIST, the superstitious man quakes, the deist himself is alarmed; the priest enters with fury, tyranny prepares his funeral pile; the uninformed applaud those punishments, which irrational laws decree against the true friend of the human species.

Such are the sentiments which every man must expect to excite, who shall dare to present to his fellow creatures that truth which all appear to be in search of, but which all fear to find, or else mistake when we are disposed to shew it to them. Indeed, what is an ATHEIST? He is a man, who destroyeth chimeras prejudicial to the human species, in order to reconduct men back to nature, to experience, and to reason. He is a thinker, who having meditated upon matter, its energy, its properties, and its modes of acting, hath no occasion, in order to explain the phænomena of the universe, and the operations of nature, to invent ideal powers, imaginary intelligences, beings

beings of the imagination, who, far from making him understand this nature better, do no more than render it capricious, inexplicable, unintelligible, and useless to the happiness of mankind.

Thus, the only men who can have simple and true ideas of nature, are considered as absurd or knavish speculators. Those who form to themselves intelligible notions of the motive-power of the universe, are accused of denying the existence of this power: those who found every thing that is operated in this world, upon constant and certain laws, are accused of *attributing every thing to chance*; they are taxed with blindness and delirium, by those enthusiasts whose imagination, always wandering in a vacuum, attributes the effects of nature to fictitious causes, which have no existence but in their own brain, to beings of the imagination, to chimerical powers, which they obstinately persist in preferring to real and known causes. No man, in his proper senses, can deny the energy of nature, or the existence of a power, by virtue of which matter acts and puts itself in motion, but no

man can, without renouncing his reason, attribute this power to a being placed out of nature, distinguished from matter, having nothing in common with it. Is it not saying, that this power does not exist, to pretend that it resides in an unknown being, formed by an heap of unintelligible qualities, of incompatible attributes, from whence necessarily results a whole, impossible to have existence? The indestructable elements, the ATOMS of EPICURUS, of which the motion, the meeting, and the combination, have produced all beings, are, without doubt, causes much more real than the theological god. Thus, to speak precisely, they are the partizans of an imaginary and contradictory being, impossible to be conceived, which the human mind cannot compass on any side, who offer us nothing but a vague name, of which every thing can be denied, of which nothing can be affirmed; they are those, I say, who make of such a being the creator, the author, the preserver of the universe, who are irrational. Are not those dreamers, who are incapable of attaching any one positive idea to the cause
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of which they are unceasingly speaking, true ATHEISTS? Are not those thinkers, who make a pure nothing the source of all the beings, truly blind men? Is it not the height of folly, to personify abstractions, or negative ideas, and then to prostrate ourselves before the fiction of our own brain?

They are, nevertheless, men of this temper, who regulate the opinions of the world, and who hold out to public scorn and vengeance, those men, who are more rational than themselves. If you believe these profound dreamers, there is nothing short of madness and phrensy that can reject in nature a motive-power, totally incomprehensible. Is it, then, delirium, to prefer the known to the unknown? Is it a crime to consult experience, to call in the evidence of our senses, in the examination of the thing the most important to be known? Is it an horrid outrage, to address ourselves to reason; to prefer its oracles to the sublime decisions of some sophists, who themselves acknowledge that they do not comprehend any thing of the god whom they announce to

to us? Nevertheless, according to them, there is no crime more worthy of punishment, there is no enterprize more dangerous against society, than to despoil the phantom which they know nothing about, of those inconceivable qualities, and of that imposing equipage, with which imagination, ignorance, fear, and imposture, have emulated each other in surrounding him; there is nothing more impious and more criminal, than to cheer up mortals against a spectre, of which the idea alone was the source of all their sorrows; there is nothing more necessary, than to exterminate those audacious beings, who have sufficient temerity to attempt to break an invisible charm, which keeps the human species benumbed in error; to be disposed to break man's chains, was to rend asunder for him his most sacred bonds.

In consequence of these clamours, perpetually renovated by imposture, and repeated by ignorance, those nations, whom in all ages, reason has sought to undeceive, have never dared to listen to her benevolent lessons.

lessons. The friends of mankind were never heard, because they were the enemies of their chimeras. Thus, the people continue to tremble; very few philosophers have the courage to cheer them; scarcely any person dares brave the public opinion, infected by superstition; they dread the power of imposture, and the menaces of tyranny, which always seek to support themselves by illusions. The cries of triumphant ignorance, and haughty fanaticism, at all times stifled the feeble voice of nature; she was obliged to keep silence, her lessons were quickly forgotten, and when she dared to speak, it was frequently only in an ænigmatical language, and unintelligible to the greater number of men. How should the uninformed, who with difficulty compass truths the most evident and the most distinctly announced, have been able to comprehend the mysteries of nature, presented under half words and emblems?

In contemplating the outrageous language, which is excited among the theologians, by the opinions of the atheists, and the punishments, which at their instigation
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were frequently decreed against them; should we not be authorized to conclude, that these doctors either are not so certain as they say they are of the existence of their god, or else that they do not consider the opinions of their adversaries to be quite so absurd as they pretend? It is always distrust, weakness, and fear, that renders men cruel; they have no anger against those whom they despise: they do not look upon folly as a punishable crime; we should be content with laughing at an irrational mortal, who should deny the existence of the sun, we should not punish him, if we were not irrational ourselves. The theological fury never proves more than the weakness of its cause; the inhumanity of these interested men, whose profession it is to announce chimeras to nations, proves to us, that they alone have an interest in these invisible powers, of whom they successfully avail themselves to terrify mortals*. They are,

* LUCIAN supposes JUPITER, who disputing with MENIPPUS, is disposed to strike him down with thun-

are, however, these tyrants of the mind, who, but little consequent to their principles, undo with one hand, that which they rear with the other: they are those, who after having made a divinity, filled with goodness, wisdom, and equity, traduce, disgrace, and completely annihilate him, by saying, that he is cruel, that he is capricious, unjust, and despotic, that he thirsts after the blood of the unhappy. This granted, these men are truly impious.

He who knoweth not the divinity, cannot do him an injury, nor, consequently, be called impious. *To be impious, says EPICURUS, is not to take away from the uninformed the gods which they have, it is to attribute to these gods the opinions of the uninformed.* To be impious, is to insult a god in whom we believe; it is to knowingly outrage him. To be impious, is to admit a good god, whilst at the same time we preach persecution

der, upon which the philosopher says to him, *ah! thou vexest thyself, thou usest thy thunder! then thou art in the wrong.*

and carnage. To be impious, is to deceive men, in the name of a god, whom we make use of as a pretext for our unworthy passions. To be impious, is to say, that a god, who is supremely happy and omnipotent, can be offended by his feeble creatures. To be impious, is to speak falsely on the part of a god, whom we suppose to be the enemy of falsehood. In fine, to be impious, is to make use of the divinity, to disturb society, to enslave them to tyrants; it is to persuade them, that the cause of imposture, is the cause of God; it is to impute to God, those crimes which would annihilate his divine perfections. To be impious and irrational at the same time, is to make a mere chimera of the god whom we adore.

On the other hand, to be pious, is to serve our country; it is to be useful to our fellow creatures; to labour to their well-being: every one can put in his claim to it, according to his faculties; him who meditates, can render himself useful, when he has the courage to announce truth, to combat error, to attack those prejudices
which

which every where oppose themselves to the happiness of mankind ; it is truly useful, and it is even a duty, to wrest from the hands of mortals, those weapons which fanaticism distributes to them, to deprive imposture and tyranny of that fatal empire of opinion, of which they successfully avail themselves at all times and in all places, to elevate themselves upon the ruins of liberty, security, and public felicity. To be truly pious, is to religiously observe the wholesome laws of nature, and to follow faithfully those duties, which she prescribes to us ; to be pious, is to be humane, equitable, benevolent ; is to respect the RIGHTS of MEN. To be pious and rational, is to reject those reveries, which would be capable of making us mistake the sober councils of reason.

Thus, whatever fanaticism and imposture may say, he who denieth the existence of a god, in seeing that it hath no other foundation than an alarmed imagination ; he who rejecteth a god, perpetually in contradiction with himself ; he who banisheth from his mind, and his heart, a god continually wrestling with nature, reason, and the

happiness of men ; he, I say, who deceiveth himself of so dangerous a chimera, may be reputed pious, honest, and virtuous, when his conduct shall not deviate from those inviolable rules, which nature and reason prescribe to him. Because a man refuseth to admit a contradictory god, as well as the obscure oracles which are given out in his name, does it then follow, that such a man, refuses to acknowledge the evident and demonstrable laws of a nature upon which he depends, of which he experiences the power, of which he is obliged to fulfil the necessary duties, under pain of being punished in this world ? It is true, that if virtue, by chance, consisted in an ignominious renunciation of reason, in a destructive fanaticism, in useless customs, the atheist could not pass for a virtuous being ; but, if virtue consists in doing to society all the good of which we are capable, the atheist may lay claim to it ; his courageous and tender soul will not be guilty for hurling his legitimate indignation against prejudices, fatal to the happiness of the human species.

Let

Let us listen, however, to the imputations which the theologians lay upon the atheists; let us coolly and without peevishness examine the calumnies which they vomit forth against them: it appears to them that atheism is the highest degree of delirium in the mind, and of perversity in the heart; interested in blackening their adversaries, they make absolute incredulity appear to be the effect of crime or folly. We do not, say they to us, see those men fall into the horrors of atheism, who have reason to hope that the future state will be for them a state of happiness. In short, according to our theologians, it is the interest of their passions, which makes them seek to doubt the existence of a being, to whom they are accountable for the abuse of this life; it is the fear of punishment alone, which is known to atheists; they are unceasingly repeating to us the words of an Hebrew prophet, who pretends that nothing but folly can make men deny the existence of the divinity*.

If

* *Dixit insipiens in corde suo non est Deus.* In taking away the negation, the proposition would be nearer truth.

if you believe some others, "nothing is
 " blacker than the heart of an atheist, no-
 " thing is more false than his mind: athe-
 " ism," according to them, "can only be the
 " offspring of a tortured conscience, that
 " seeks to disengage itself from the cause
 " of its trouble. We have a right," says
 DERHAM, "to look upon an atheist as a
 " monster amongst rational beings, as one
 " of those extraordinary productions, which
 " we hardly ever meet with in the whole
 " human species, and who opposing himself
 " to all other men, revolts not only against
 " reason, and human nature, but against
 " the divinity himself."

We shall reply to all these calumnies,
 by saying, that it is for the reader to judge
 if the system of atheism be as absurd as
 these profound speculators, perpetually in
 dispute on the unformed, contradictory, and

truth. Those who shall be disposed to see the abuse
 which theological spleen knows how to scatter upon
 atheists, have only to read a work of DOCTOR BENT-
 LEY'S, intitled, THE FOLLY OF ATHEISM: it is tran-
 slated into latin, in octavo.

fantastical

fantastical productions of their own brain, would have it believed to be*? It is true, that perhaps hitherto the system of naturalism has not yet been developped in all its extent; unprejudiced persons, will, at least, be enabled to know, whether the author has reasoned well or ill, if he has disguised the most important difficulties, if he has been disingenuous, if like unto the enemies of human reason, he has had recourse to subterfuges, to sophisms, to subtle distinctions, which ought always to make it be suspected of those who use them, either that that they do not know, or that they fear the truth. It belongs, then, to candour, to disinterestedness, to reason, to judge if the natural principles, which have been here brought forward, be destitute of foun-

* In seeing the theologians so frequently accuse the atheists with being absurd, we should be tempted to believe that they have no idea of that which the atheists have to oppose to them: it is true, they have established an excellent method; the priests say and publish what they please, whilst their adversaries can never shew themselves.

dation;

dation; it is to these upright judges, that a disciple of nature, submits his opinions; he has a right to except against the judgment of enthusiasm, of presumptuous ignorance, and interested knavery. Those persons, who are accustomed to think, will, at least, find reasons to doubt many of those marvellous notions, which appear as incontestible truths, only to those who have never examined them, by the standard of good sense.

We agree with DERHAM, that atheists are rare; superstition has so disfigured nature, and its rights; enthusiasm has so dazzled the human mind; terror has so disturbed the hearts of men; imposture and tyranny have so enslaved the thought; in fine, error, ignorance, and delirium, have so perplexed and entangled the clearest ideas, that nothing is more uncommon, than to find men who have sufficient courage to undeceive themselves of notions, which every thing conspires to identify with their existence. Indeed, many theologians, in despite of those invectives, with which they attempt to overwhelm the atheists, appear
I frequently

frequently to have doubted, whether any existed in the world, or if there were persons, who could honestly deny the existence of a god*. Their uncertainty, was, without doubt, founded upon the absurd ideas

* Those same persons, who at the present day discover Atheism to be such a strange system, admit there could have been atheists formerly. Is it, then, that nature has endued us with a less portion of reason, than she did men of other times? Or should it be that the god of the present day would be less absurd, than the gods of antiquity? Have the human species then acquired information, with respect to this concealed motive-power of nature? Is, then, the god of modern mythology, rejected by VANINI, HOBBES, SPINOSA, and some others, more to be credited than the gods of the pagan mythology, rejected by EPICURUS, STRATO, THEODORUS, DIAGORAS, &c. &c.? TERTULLIAN pretended that Christianity had dissipated that ignorance in which the pagans were immersed, respecting the divine essence, and that there was not an artizan among the Christians who did not see God, and who did not know him. Nevertheless, TERTULLIAN himself admitted a corporeal god, and was therefore an atheist, according to the notions of modern theology. SEE THE NOTE TO THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF THIS PART, PAGE 279.

which they ascribe to their adversaries, whom they have unceasingly accused of attributing every thing to CHANCE, to *blind* causes, to *dead* and *inert* matter, incapable of acting by itself. We have, I think, sufficiently justified the partizans of nature, from these ridiculous accusations; we have, throughout the whole, proved, and we repeat it, that CHANCE is a word devoid of sense, which, as well as the word GOD, announces nothing but an ignorance of true causes. We have demonstrated, that matter is not dead; that nature, essentially active, and self-existent, had sufficient energy to produce all the beings which it contains, and all the phænomena which we behold. We have, throughout, made it felt, that this cause was much more real, and more easy to be conceived, than the fictitious, contradictory, inconceivable, and impossible cause, to which theology ascribes the honour of those great effects which it admires. We have represented that the incomprehensibility of natural effects was not a sufficient reason for assigning them a cause, still more incomprehensible than all those

those of which we can have a knowledge. In fine, if the incomprehensibility of God does not authorize us to deny his existence, it is, at least, certain that the incompatibility of the attributes which they accord to him, authorizes us to deny that the being who unites them can be any thing more than a chimera, of which the existence is impossible.

This granted, we shall be able to fix the sense that ought to be attached to the name of ATHEIST, which, notwithstanding, the theologians, on other occasions, lavish indiscriminately upon all those who deviate in any thing from their revered opinions. If by ATHEIST, be designated, a man who denieth the existence of a power, inherent in matter, and without which we cannot conceive nature, and if it be to this power that the name of GOD is given, there do not exist any atheists, and the word under which they are designated would only announce fools: But, if by ATHEISTS, be understood men without enthusiasm, guided by experience, and the evidence of their

senses, who see nothing in nature but that which they find really to have existence, or that which they are capacitated to know; who do not perceive, and cannot perceive, any thing but matter, essentially active and moveable, diversely combined, enjoying from itself various properties, and capable of producing all the beings which display themselves to our visual faculties: If by ATHEISTS, be understood, natural philosophers, who are convinced that, without recurring to a chimerical cause, they can explain every thing simply by the laws of motion, by the relations subsisting between beings, by their affinities, their analogies, their attraction, and their repulsion; by their proportions, their composition, and their decomposition*: If by ATHEISTS, be understood,

* DOCTOR CUDWORTH, in his SYSTEMA INTELLECTUALE, CH. II. reckons four species of ATHEISTS among the ancients: 1st, The disciples of ANAXAMANDER, called HYLOPATHIANS, who attributed the formation of every thing to matter, destitute of feeling. 2d, The
ATOMISTS,

stood, those persons who do not know what a SPIRIT is, and who do not see the necessity of SPIRITUALIZING, or of rendering incomprehensible those corporeal, sensible, and natural causes, which they see act uniformly; who do not find that to separate the motive-power from the universe, to give it to a being placed out of the great whole, to a being of an essence totally inconceivable, and whose abode cannot be shewn, is a means of becoming

ATOMISTS, or the disciples of DEMOCRITUS, who attributed every thing to the concurrence of atoms. 3d, The stoical ATHEISTS, who admitted a blind nature, but acting after certain laws. 4th, The HYLOZOISTS, or the disciples of STRATO, who attributed life to matter. It is well to observe, that the most learned natural philosophers of antiquity, have been atheists, either openly or secretly; but their doctrine was always opposed by the superstition of the uninformed, and almost totally eclipsed by the fanatical and marvellous philosophy of PYTHAGORAS, and above all by that of PLATO. So true it is, that enthusiasm, and that which is vague and obscure, commonly prevail over that which is simple, natural, and intelligible. See LE CLERC'S SELECT PIECES, VOL. II.

better

better acquainted with it: If by **ATHEISTS**, be understood, those men who ingenuously allow that their mind cannot conceive nor reconcile the negative attributes, and the theological abstractions, with the human and moral qualities which are attributed to the divinity; or those men, who pretend that from this incompatible alliance, there can only result an imaginary being, seeing that a pure spirit is destitute of the organs necessary to exercise the qualities and faculties of human nature: If by **ATHEISTS**, be designated, those men who reject a phantom, of whom the odious and discordant qualities are calculated only to disturb the human species, and plunge it into very prejudicial follies: If, I say, thinkers of this sort, are those who are called **ATHEISTS**, it is not possible to doubt of their existence; and there would be found a considerable number of them, if the lights of sound natural philosophy, and of just reason, were more generally diffused; from thence they would neither be considered as irrational, nor as furious beings, but as men devoid of prejudice, of whom

whom the opinions, or, if they will, the ignorance, would be much more useful to the human species, than those sciences, and those vain hypotheses, which have so long been the true causes of all man's sorrows.

On the other hand, if by ATHEISTS, it is wished to designate those men who are themselves obliged to avow that they have no one idea of the chimera whom they adore, or which they announce to others; who cannot render themselves an account, either of the nature, or of the essence of their deified phantom; who can never agree amongst themselves, upon the proofs of the existence of their god, of his qualities, or of his mode of action; who by dint of negations, make him a pure NOTHING; who prostrate themselves, or cause others to fall prostrate, before the absurd fictions of their own delirium—if, I say, by ATHEISTS, be designated, men of this kind, we shall be obliged to allow that the world is filled with atheists; and we shall even be enabled to place in this number the most active theologians, who are un-

ceasingly

ceasingly reasoning upon that which they do not understand; who are disputing upon a being of whom they cannot demonstrate the existence; who by their contradictions, very efficaciously undermine this existence; who annihilate their perfect god, by the assistance of those numberless imperfections, which they ascribe to him; who rebel against this god, by the atrocious character under which they depict him. In short, we shall be able to consider as true atheists, those credulous people, who, upon hearsay, and from tradition, fall upon their knees before a being, of whom they have no other ideas, than those which are furnished them by their spiritual guides, who themselves acknowledge that they comprehend nothing about the matter. An atheist, is a man who does not believe the existence of a god; now, no one can be certain of the existence of a being whom he does not conceive, and who is said to unite incompatible qualities.

What has been said, proves that the theologians themselves have not always

known the sense, which they could attach to the word, ATHEIST; they have, in a vague manner, calumniated and combated them as persons whose sentiments and principles were opposed to their own. Indeed, we see that these sublime doctors, always infatuated with their own particular opinions, have frequently been lavish in their accusations of atheism, against all those whom they were disposed to injure and to blacken, and whose systems they sought to render odious: they were certain of alarming the uninformed and the silly, by a vague imputation, or by a word to which ignorance attaches an idea of terror, because they have no knowledge of its true sense. In consequence of this policy, we have frequently seen the partisans of the same religious sect, the adorers of the same god, reciprocally treat each other as atheists, in the heat of their theological quarrels: to be an atheist, in this sense, is not to have, in every point, exactly the same opinions as those with whom we dispute upon religion. In all times, the uninformed have considered those as athe-

ists, who did not think precisely in the same manner of the divinity, as the guides whom they were accustomed to follow. **SOCRATES**, the adorer of a single god, was no more than an atheist, in the eyes of the Athenian people.

Still more, as we have already observed, those persons have frequently been accused of atheism, who have taken the greatest pains to establish the existence of a god, but who have not produced satisfactory proofs of it. When on a similar subject the proofs were frail and perishable, it was easy for their enemies to make them pass for atheists, who had wickedly betrayed the cause of the divinity, by defending him too feebly. I shall here stop to shew what little foundation there is for that which is said to be an evident truth, whilst it is so frequently attempted to be proved, and yet can never be verified, even to the satisfaction of those who boast so much of being intimately convinced of it; at least, it is certain, that in examining the principles of those who have essayed to prove the existence

istence of God, they have been generally found weak or false, because they could not be either solid or true; the theologians themselves have been obliged to discover, that their adversaries could draw from them, inductions quite contrary to those notions which they have an interest in maintaining; in consequence, they have been frequently very highly incensed against those who believed they had discovered the most forcible proofs of the existence of their god; they did not see, without doubt, that it was impossible not to lay themselves open to attack in establishing principles, or systems, visibly founded upon an imaginary and contradictory being, which each man sees variously*.

* What can we think of the sentiments of a man, who expresses himself like PASCHAL, *in the eighth article of his Thoughts*, wherein he discovers, at least, a most complete incertitude, upon the existence of God? *I have examined*, says he, *if this god, of whom all the world speak, might not have left some marks of himself. I look every where, and every where I see nothing but obscurity. Nature offers me nothing, that may not be a*

In a word, all those who have taken the cause of the theological god in hand, with the most vigour, have been taxed with atheism and irreligion; his most zealous partizans have been looked upon as deserters and traitors; the most religious theologians have not been able to guarantee themselves from this reproach; they have mutually lavished it on each other, and all have, without doubt, merited it, if by atheists be designated, those men who have not any idea of their god which does not destroy itself, as soon as they are willing to submit it to the touchstone of reason.

matter of doubt and inquietude. If I saw nothing in nature which indicated a divinity, I should determine with myself, to believe nothing about it. If I every where saw the signs of a creator, I should repose myself in peace, in the belief of one. But seeing too much to deny, and too little to assure me of his existence, I am in a situation that I lament, and in which I have an hundred times wished, that if a GOD did sustain nature, he would give unequivocal marks of it, and that if the signs which he hath given be deceitful, that he would suppress them entirely: that he said all or nothing, to the end that I might see which side I ought to follow. Here is the state of a good mind, wrestling with the prejudices that enslave it.

CHAP.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

IS ATHEISM COMPATIBLE WITH
MORALITY ?

AFTER having proved the existence of
atheists, let us return to the calum-
nies which are lavished upon them, by the
deicolists. "An Atheist," according to
Abbadie, "cannot be virtuous; to him
" VIRTUE is only a chimera, PROBITY
" no more than a vain scruple, HONESTY
" nothing but foolishness. - - He knoweth
" no other law than his interest; where
" this sentiment prevails, conscience is
" only a prejudice, the law of nature only
" an illusion, right no more than an error;
" benevolence hath no longer any founda-
" tion; the bonds of society are loosened;
" fidelity is removed; the friend is ready
" to betray his friend; the citizen to de-
" liver up his country; the son to assassi-
nate

“ nate his father, in order to enjoy his
“ inheritance, whenever he shall find an
“ occasion, and that authority or silence,
“ will shield him from the arm of the
“ secular power, which alone is to be
“ feared. The most inviolable rights, and
“ the most sacred laws, must no longer be
“ considered, but as dreams and visions*.”

Such, perhaps, would be the conduct, not of a thinking, feeling, reflecting being, susceptible of reason, but of a ferocious brute, of an irrational creature, who should not have any idea of the natural relations which subsist between beings necessary to their reciprocal happiness. Can it be supposed, that a man, capable of experience, furnished with the faintest glimmerings of good sense, would allow himself to use the conduct which is here ascribed to the atheist, that is to say, to a man, who is sufficiently susceptible of reflection, to undeceive himself, by reasoning, of those prejudices, which every thing strives to shew him as

* See ABBADY *on the Truth of the Christian Religion*,
VOL. I. CHAPTER XVII.

important and sacred? Can it, I say, be supposed, that there is in any polished society, a citizen sufficiently blind, not to acknowledge his most natural duties, his dearest interests, the danger which he runs in disturbing his fellow creatures, or in following no other rule than his momentary appetites? A being, who reasons the least in the world, is he not obliged to feel that society is advantageous to him, that he hath need of assistance, that the esteem of his fellow creatures is necessary to his happiness, that he hath every thing to fear from the wrath of his associates, that the laws menace whoever dare infringe them? Every man, who hath received a virtuous education, who hath in his infancy experienced the tender cares of a father, who hath in consequence tasted the sweetness of friendship, who hath received kindnesses, who knoweth the value of benevolence and equity, who feeleth the pleasure which the affection of our fellow creatures procures for us, and the inconveniences which result from their aversion and their contempt, is he not obliged to tremble at losing such manifest

nifest advantages, and at incurring, by his conduct, such visible dangers? Will not the hatred, the fear, the contempt of himself, disturb his repose, every time that, turning inwardly upon himself, he shall contemplate himself with the same eyes as others? Is there, then, no remorse, but for those who believe in a god? The idea of being seen by a being of whom we have, at best, very vague notions, is it more forcible, than the idea of being seen by men, of being seen by ourselves, of being obliged to fear, of being in the cruel necessity of hating ourselves, and to blush in thinking of our conduct, and of the sentiments which it must infallibly attract?

This granted, we shall reply, with deliberation, to this ABBADY, that an atheist is a man who knoweth nature and its laws, who knoweth his own nature, who knoweth what it imposes upon him: An atheist hath experience, and this experience, proveth to him, every moment, that vice can injure him, that his most concealed faults, that his most secret dispositions may be detected and display him
in

in open day: this experience proveth to him that society is useful to his happiness; that his interest demands, that he should attach himself to the country which protects him, and which enables him to enjoy in security the benefits of nature; every thing shews him, that in order to be happy, he must make himself beloved; that his father is for him the most certain of friends; that ingratitude would remove from him his benefactor; that justice is necessary to the maintenance of every association; and that no man, whatever may be his power, can be content with himself, when he knoweth he is an object of public hatred.

He who hath maturely reflected upon himself, upon his own nature, and upon that of his associates, upon his own wants, and upon the means of procuring them, cannot prevent himself from knowing his duties, from discovering that which he oweth to himself, and that which he oweth to others; then he hath morality, he hath real motives to conform himself to its dictates; he is obliged to feel, that

these duties are necessary ; and if his reason be not disturbed by blind passions, or by vicious habits, he will feel that virtue is for all men the surest road to felicity. The atheists, or the fatalists, found all their systems upon necessity ; thus, their moral speculations, founded upon the necessity of things, are, at least, much more permanent and more invariable, than those which only rest upon a god who changes his aspect, according to the dispositions and the passions of all those who contemplate him. The nature of things, and its immutable laws, are not subject to vary ; the atheist is always obliged to call that which injures him, vice and folly ; to call that which injures others, crime ; to call that which is advantageous to society, or which contributes to its permanent happiness, virtue.

We see, then, that the principles of the atheist are much less liable to be shaken, than those of the enthusiast, who founds his morality upon an imaginary being, of whom the idea so frequently varies, even in his own brain. If the atheist denies
the

the existence of a god, he cannot deny his own existence, nor that of beings similar to himself, with whom he sees himself surrounded; he cannot doubt of the relations which subsist between them and him, he cannot question the necessity of the duties which flow from these relations, he cannot, then, be dubious on the principles of morality, which is nothing more than the science of the relations subsisting between beings, living together in society.

If, satisfied with a barren speculative knowledge of his duties, the atheist does not apply them to his conduct; if hurried away by his passions, or by criminal habits, if given up to shameful vices, if possessing a vicious temperament, he appears to forget his moral principles; it does not follow, that he hath no principles, or that his principles are false; it can only be concluded from such conduct, that in the intoxication of his passions, in the confusion of his reason, he doth not put in practice speculations extremely true; that he forgets ascertained

principles, to follow those propensities which lead him astray.

Indeed, nothing is more common amongst men, than a very marked discordance between the mind and the heart; that is to say, between the temperament, the passions, the habits, the whims, the imagination, and the mind, or the judgment, assisted by reflection. Nothing is more rare, than to find these things in harmony; it is then that we see speculation influence practice. The most certain virtues, are those which are founded upon the temperament of men. Indeed, do we not every day see mortals in contradiction with themselves? Doth not their judgment unceasingly condemn the extravagancies to which their passions deliver them up? In short, doth not every thing prove to us, that men, with the best theory, have sometimes the worst practice; and with the most vicious theory, have frequently the most estimable conduct? In the blindest, the most atrocious superstitions, and those which are the most contrary to reason, we meet with virtuous men; the mildness of their character,
the

the sensibility of their heart, the excellence of their temperament, reconduct them to humanity, and to the laws of their nature, in despite of their furious theories. Amongst the adorers of a cruel, vindictive, and jealous god, we find peaceable souls, who are enemies to persecution, to violence, and to cruelty; and amongst the disciples of a god filled with mercy and clemency, we see monsters of barbarity and inhumanity. Nevertheless, the one and the other acknowledge, that their god ought to serve them for a model: wherefore then do they not conform themselves to him? It is because the temperament of man is always more powerful than his gods; it is because the most wicked gods cannot always corrupt a virtuous soul, and that the most gentle gods cannot always correct those hearts driven along by crime. The organization will always be more puissant than religion; present objects, momentary interests, rooted habits, public opinion, have much more power than imaginary beings, or than theories, which themselves depend upon this organization.

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The point in question, then, is, to examine if the principles of the atheist be true, and not if his conduct be commendable. An atheist, who, having an excellent theory, founded upon nature, experience, and reason, delivers himself up to excesses, dangerous to himself, and injurious to society, is, without doubt, an inconsistent man. But, he is not more to be feared than a religious and zealous man, who, believing in a good, equitable, and perfect god, does not scruple to commit the most frightful excesses in his name. An atheistical tyrant, would not be more to be dreaded than a fanatical tyrant. An incredulous philosopher is not so dreadful as an enthusiastic priest, who fans the flame of discord amongst his fellow citizens. Would, then, an atheist, clothed with power, be equally dangerous as a persecuting king, a savage inquisitor, a whimsical devotee, or a morose bigot? These are assuredly more numerous than atheists, of whom the opinions and the vices are far from being in a condition to have an influence upon society, which is too much blinded by
prejudice

prejudice to be disposed to give them an hearing.

An intemperate and voluptuous atheist, is not a man more to be feared than he who is superstitious, who knows how to connect licentiousness, libertinism, and corruption of morals, with his religious notions. Can it be imagined, with sincerity, that a man, because he is an atheist, or because he doth not fear the vengeance of gods, will be continually intoxicated, will corrupt the wife of his friend, will break open his neighbour's dwelling, and permit himself to commit all those excesses, which are the most prejudicial to himself, or the most deserving of punishment? The blemishes of an atheist, have not, then, any thing more extraordinary in them, than those of the religious man, they have nothing with which to reproach his doctrine. A tyrant, who should be incredulous, would not be a more incommodious scourge to his subjects, than a religious tyrant; would the people of the latter be more happy from the circumstance that the tiger who governed them, believed in a god, heaped presents upon his priests, and

and humiliated himself at their feet? At least, under the dominion of an atheist, they would not have to apprehend religious vexations, persecutions for opinions, proscriptions, or those strange outrage, for which the interests of heaven are frequently the pretext, under the mildest princes. If a nation be the victim of the passions and the folly of a sovereign, who is an infidel, it will not, at least, be those of his blind infatuation for theological systems, which he doth not understand, nor of his fanatical zeal, which of all the passions that infest kings, is always the most destructive and the most dangerous. An atheistical tyrant, who should persecute for opinions, would be a man not consistent with his principles; he would only furnish one more example, that mortals much more frequently follow their passions, their interests, their temperaments, than their speculations. It is, at least, evident, that an atheist has one pretext less, than a credulous prince, for exercising his natural wickedness.

Indeed, if men condescended to examine things coolly, they would find, that the name of God is never made use of on earth, but for a pretext to indulge their passions. Ambition, imposture, and tyranny, have formed a league, to avail themselves of it in conjunction, to the end that they may blind the people, and bend them beneath their yoke. The monarch makes use of it, to give a divine lustre to his person, the sanction of heaven to his rights, and the confidence of its oracles to his most unjust and most extravagant whims. The priest uses it, to give currency to his pretensions, to the end that he may, with impunity, gratify his avarice, pride, and independence. The vindictive and enraged superstitious being introduces the cause of his god, that he may give free scope to his fury, which he qualifies with zeal. In short, religion becomes dangerous, because it justifies and renders legitimate or commendable those passions and crimes, of which it gathers the fruit: according to its ministers, every thing is permitted to revenge the Most-high; thus, the divinity appears to be

made only to authorize and palliate the most injurious transgressions. The atheist, when he committeth crimes, cannot, at least, pretend that it is his god who commandeth and approveth them; this is the excuse which the superstitious being offers us for his wickedness; the tyrant for his persecutions; the priest for his cruelty and sedition; the fanatic for his excesses; the penitent for his inutility.

“They are not,” says BAYLE, “the general opinions of the mind, which determine us to act, but the passions.” Atheism is a system, which will not make a good man wicked, neither will it make a wicked man good. “Those,” says the same author, “who embraced the sect of EPICURUS, did not become debauchees, because they had embraced the doctrine of EPICURUS; they only embraced the doctrine of EPICURUS, then badly understood, because they were debauchees*.” In the same manner, a
perverse

* See BAYLE'S THOUGHTS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS. § 177. SENECA had said before him, *Ita*

perverse man may embrace atheism, because he will flatter himself, that this system will give full scope to his passions; he will nevertheless be deceived; atheism, if well understood, is founded upon nature and reason, which never will, like religion, either justify or expiate the crimes of the wicked.

From the doctrine which makes morality depend upon the existence and the will of a god, who is proposed to men for a model, there unquestionably results a very great inconvenience. Corrupt souls, in discovering how much each of these suppositions are erroneous or doubtful, loosed the rein of all their vices, and concluded, that there were not more real motives to do good; they imagined, that virtue, like the gods, was only a chimera, and that there was not any reason for practising it in this world. Nevertheless, it is evident, that it is not as creatures of god, that we are bound to

non ab Epicuro impulsæ luxuriantur, sed vitiis dediti, luxuriam suam in philosophiæ sinu abscondunt.

See SENECA DE VITA BEATA, CHAP. XII.

fulfil the duties of morality; it is as men, as sensible beings, living together in society, and seeking to conserve ourselves in an happy existence, that we feel the moral obligation. Whether there exists a god, or whether he exists not, our duties will be the same; and our nature, if consulted, will prove to us THAT VICE IS AN EVIL, AND THAT VIRTUE IS A REAL AND SUBSTANTIAL GOOD*.

If,

* We are assured, that there have been found PHILOSOPHERS, and ATHEISTS, who deny the distinction of VICE and VIRTUE, and who have preached up debauchery and licentiousness of manners; in this number, may be reckoned ARISTIPPUS, and THEODORUS, surnamed the ATHEIST, BION, the Boristhenite, PYRRHO, &c. amongst the ancients (see DIOGENES LAERTIUS); and amongst the moderns, the author of the FABLE OF THE BEES, which, however, could only have been intended to make it felt, that in the present constitution of things, vices have identified themselves with nations, and have become necessary to them, in the same manner as strong liquors to those who have habituated themselves to their use. The author who has recently published the MAN AUTOMATON, has reasoned upon morality like a madman. If these authors, had consulted nature upon morality,

If, then, there be found atheists, who have denied the distinction of good and evil, or who have dared to strike at the foun-

morality, as well as upon religion, they would have found, that, far from being conducive to vice and depravity, it is conducive to virtue.

Nunquam aliud natura, aliud sapientia dicitur.

JUV. SAT. 14, V. 321.

In despite of the pretended dangers, which so many people believe they see in atheism, antiquity did not judge of it so unfavourably. DIOGENES LAERTIUS informs us, that EPICURUS was in incredible favour, that his country caused statues to be erected to him, that he had a prodigious number of friends, and that his school subsisted for a very long period. See DIOGENES LAERTIUS, x. 9. CICERO, although an enemy to the opinions of the EPICUREANS, gives a brilliant testimony to the probity of EPICURUS and his disciples, who were remarkable for the friendship they bore each other. See CICERO DE FINIBUS, II. 25. The philosophy of EPICURUS was publickly taught in ATHENS, during many centuries, and LACTANCE says, that it was the most followed. *Epicuri disciplina multo celebrior semper fuit quam cæterorum.* V. INSTITUT. DIVIN. III. 17. In the time of MARCUS AURELIUS, there was at ATHENS a public professor of the philosophy of EPICURUS, paid by that emperor, who was himself a STOIC.

dation of all morality, we ought to conclude, that upon this point they have reasoned badly, that they have neither been acquainted with the nature of man, nor known the true source of his duties; that they have falsely imagined, that morality as well as theology, was only an ideal science, and that the gods once destroyed there no longer remained any bonds to connect mortals. Nevertheless, the smallest reflection would have proved to them that morality is founded upon the immutable relations subsisting between sensible, intelligent, and sociable beings; that without virtue, no society can maintain itself; that without putting a curb on his desires, no man can conserve himself. Men are constrained from their nature to love virtue, and to dread crime, by the same necessity that obliges them to seek happiness, and fly from sorrow; this nature obliges them to place a difference between those objects which please them, and those which injure them. Ask a man who is sufficiently irrational to deny the difference between virtue and vice, if it would be indifferent to him,

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to be beaten, robbed, calumniated, repaid with ingratitude, dishonoured by his wife, insulted by his children, betrayed by his friend? His answer will prove to you that, whatever he may say, he makes a difference in the actions of men; and that the distinction of good and evil does not depend, either upon the conventions of men, or upon the ideas which they can have upon the divinity, neither upon the recompenses, or upon the punishments, which he prepares in the other life.

On the contrary, an atheist, who should reason with justness, would feel himself much more interested, than another, in practising those virtues, to which he finds his happiness attached in this world. If his views do not extend themselves beyond the limits of his present existence, he must, at least, desire to see his days roll on in happiness, and in peace. Every man, who during the calm of his passions, falls back upon himself, will feel that his interest invites him to conserve himself; that his felicity demands that he should take the necessary means to enjoy life peaceably,

ably and exempt from alarm and remorse. Man oweth something to man, not because he would offend a god if he were to injure his fellow creature, but because, in doing him an injury, he would offend a man, and would violate the laws of equity, in the maintenance of which, every being of the human species finds himself interested.

We every day see persons who are possessed of great talents, knowledge, and penetration, join to them the most hideous vices, and have a very corrupt heart: their opinions may be true in some respects, and false in a great many others; their principles may be just, but the inductions which they draw from them are frequently defective and precipitate. A man may have at the same time sufficient knowledge to undeceive himself of some of his errors, and too little energy to divest himself of his vicious propensities. Men are only that which their organization, modified by habit, by education, by example, by the government, by transitory or permanent circumstances, make them. Their religious ideas
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and their imaginary systems are obliged to yield or accommodate themselves to their temperaments, their propensities, and their interests. If the system which makes man an atheist does not remove from him the vices which he had before, neither does it not give him any new ones: whereas superstition furnishes its disciples with a thousand pretexts for committing evil without remorse, and even to applaud themselves for the commission of crime. Atheism, at least, leaves men such as they are; it will not render a man more intemperate, more debauched, more cruel, than his temperament before invited him to be; whereas superstition gives loose to the most terrible passions, or else procures easy expiations for the most dishonourable vices. "ATHEISM," says Chancellor BACON, "leaves to man reason, philosophy, natural piety, laws, reputation, and every thing that can serve to conduct him to virtue; but SUPERSTITION destroys all these things, and erects itself into a tyranny over the understandings of men: this is the reason why atheism ne-

“ ver disturbs the government, but renders man more clear-sighted, as seeing nothing beyond the bounds of this life.” The same author adds, “ that the times in which men have turned towards atheism have been the most tranquil; whereas superstition has always inflamed their minds and carried them on to the greatest disorders, because it infatuates the people with novelties, which wrest from, and carry with them all the authority of government*.”

Men habituated to meditate, and to make study a pleasure, are not commonly dangerous citizens; whatever may be their speculations, they never produce sudden revolutions upon the earth. The minds of the people, susceptible of being inflamed by the marvellous and by enthusiasm, obstinately resist the most simple truths, and never heat themselves for systems that demand a long train of reflection and reasoning. The system of atheism can only be the result of long and connected study; of an

* See the MORAL ESSAYS of BACON.

imagination cooled by experience and reasoning. The peaceable EPICURUS never disturbed GREECE; the poem of LUCRETIUS caused no civil wars in ROME; BODIN was not the author of the *confederacy*; the writings of SPINOSA have not excited the same troubles in HOLLAND, as the disputes of GOMAR and D'ARMINIUS. HOBBS did not cause blood to flow in ENGLAND, although, in his time, religious fanaticism made a king perish on the scaffold.

In short, we can defy the enemies to human reason to cite a single example which proves, in a decisive manner, that opinions purely philosophical, or directly contrary to religion, have ever excited disturbances in the state. Tumults have always arisen from theological opinions, because both princes and people have always foolishly believed they ought to take a part in them. There is nothing so dangerous as that empty philosophy which the theologians have combined with their systems. It is to philosophy corrupted by priests, that it peculiarly belongs to fan the flames of discord,

invite the people to rebellion, and cause rivers of blood to flow. There is no theological question which has not occasioned immense mischiefs to man; whilst all the writings of the atheists, whether ancient or modern, have never caused any evil but to their authors, whom omnipotent imposture has frequently immolated at his shrine.

The principles of atheism are not formed for the mass of the people who are commonly under the tutelage of their priests; they are not calculated for those frivolous and dissipated minds who fill society with their vices and their inutility; they are not suited to the ambitious, to those intriguers, and restless minds, who find their interest in disturbing the harmony of the social compact: much less are they made for a great number of persons enlightened in other respects, who have but very rarely the courage to completely divorce themselves from the received prejudices.

So many causes unite themselves to confirm men in those errors, which they have been made to suck in with their mother's milk, that every step which removes them from these errors, costs them infinite pains. Those
persons

persons who are most enlightened, frequently cling on some side to the general prejudices. We see ourselves, to say thus, isolated, we do not speak the language of society, when we are alone in our opinions; it requires courage to adopt a mode of thinking that has but few approvers. In those countries where human knowledge has made some progress, and where, besides, a certain freedom of thinking is enjoyed, we can easily find a great number of deists or of incredulous beings, who, contented with having trodden under foot the grosser prejudices of the uninformed, have not dared to go back to their source, and cite the divinity himself before the tribunal of Reason. If these thinkers did not stop on the road, reflection would quickly prove to them, that the god whom they have not the courage to examine, is a being as injurious, and as revolting to good sense, as any of those doctrines, mysteries, fables, or superstitious customs of which they have already acknowledged the futility; they would feel, as we have already proved, that all these things are no more than the necessary conse-

quences of those primitive notions which men have indulged respecting their divine phantom, and that, in admitting this phantom, they have no longer any rational cause to reject those inductions which the imagination must draw from it. A little attention would shew them that it is precisely this phantom who is the true cause of all the evils of society; that those endless quarrels, and those bloody disputes to which religion and the spirit of party give birth every instant, are the inevitable effects of the importance which they attach to a chimera, ever calculated to put the minds of men into combustion. In short, it is easy to convince ourselves that an imaginary being, who is always painted under a terrific aspect, must act in a lively manner upon the imagination, and must produce, sooner or later, disputes, enthusiasm, fanaticism, and delirium.

Many persons acknowledge that the extravagancies to which religion gives birth, are real evils; many persons complain of the abuse of religion, but there are very few who feel that this abuse, and these evils
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are the necessary consequences of the fundamental principles of all religion, which can itself be founded only upon those grievous notions which men are obliged to form to themselves of the divinity. We every day see persons undeceived upon religion, who pretend, nevertheless, that this religion is *necessary for the people*, who could not be kept within bounds without it. But to reason thus, is it not to say, that poison is useful to the people, that it is proper to poison them, to prevent them from making a bad use of their power? Is it not to pretend that it is advantageous to render them absurd, irrational, extravagant; that they have need of phantoms, calculated to make them giddy, to blind them, and to submit them to fanatics or to impostors, who will avail themselves of their follies to disturb the universe? Besides, is it quite true that religion has an influence over the morals of the people in a manner that is really useful? It is very easy to see that it enslaves them without rendering them better; it makes an herd of ignorant slaves, whom their panic terrors keep under the yoke of tyrants and priests;
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it makes stupid beings, who know no other virtue than a blind submission to futile customs, to which they attach a much greater value than to real virtues, or to the duties of morality, which have never been made known to them. If, by chance, this religion restrains some few timid individuals, it does not restrain the greatest number, who suffer themselves to be hurried along by the epidemical vices with which they are infected. It is in those countries where superstition has the greatest power, that we shall always find the least morality. Virtue is incompatible with ignorance, superstition, and slavery: slaves are only kept in subordination by the fear of punishments; ignorant children are intimidated only for an instant by imaginary terrors. To form men, to have virtuous citizens, it is necessary to instruct them, to shew them truth, to speak reason to them, to make them feel their interests, to learn them to respect themselves, and to fear shame; to excite in them the idea of true HONOUR, to make them know the value of VIRTUE, and the motives for following it. How can these
happy

happy effects be expected from religion, which degrades men, or from tyranny which only proposes to itself to vanquish them, to divide them, and to keep them in an abject condition?

The false ideas which so many persons have of the utility of religion, which they at least judge to be calculated to restrain the people, arise from the fatal prejudice that there are *useful errors*, and that truth may be dangerous. This principle is completely calculated to eternize the sorrows of the earth: whoever shall have the courage to examine these things, will acknowledge, without hesitation, that all the sorrows of the human species are to be ascribed to his errors, and that of these, religious errors must be the most prejudicial from the haughtiness with which they inspire sovereigns, from the importance which is attached to them, from the abject condition which they prescribe to subjects, from the phrenzy which they excite among the people: we shall therefore be obliged to conclude that the sacred errors of men are those of which the interest of mankind demands the

most complete destruction, and that it is principally to the annihilation of them, that sound philosophy ought to attach itself. It is not to be feared, that this attempt will produce either disorders or revolutions; the more freedom truth shall be spoken with, the more singular it will appear; the more simple it shall be, the less it will seduce men who are smitten with the marvellous; even those men who seek after truth with the most ardour, have an irresistible inclination, that carries them on and incessantly disposes them to reconcile error with its opposite*.

Here is, without doubt, the reason why atheism, of which, hitherto, the principles have not been sufficiently developped, ap-

* The illustrious BAYLE, who teaches us so ably to think, says, with great reason, that *there is nothing but a good and solid philosophy, which can, like another Hercules, exterminate those monsters, popular errors: it is that alone which can set the mind at liberty.* See THOUGHTS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS, § 21. LUCRETIVS had said before him,

*Hunc igitur terrorem animi, tenebrasque necesse est
Non radii solis, neque lucida tela dici
Discutiant, sed NATURÆ species, ratioque.*

See LUCRETIVS, LIB. I. V. 147.

pears

pears to alarm even those persons who are the most destitute of prejudice. They find the interval too great between the vulgar superstition, and absolute irreligion: they believe they take a wise medium, in compounding with error; they reject the consequences while admitting the principle; they preserve the phantom without foreseeing that, sooner or later, it must produce the same effects, and give birth, one after another, to the same follies in the heads of human beings. The major part of the incredulous and of the reformers, do no more than prune a poisoned tree, to whose roots they have not dared to apply the axe; they do not see that this tree will, in the end, reproduce the same fruits. Theology, or religion, will always be an heap of combustible matter; brooded in the imagination of mankind, it will always finish by causing conflagrations. As long as the sacerdotal order shall have the privilege of infecting youth, of habituating it to tremble before words, of alarming nations with the name of a terrible god, fanaticism will be master of the mind, imposture will, at its pleasure, sow discord

in the state. The most simple phantom, perpetually fed, modified, and exaggerated by the imagination of men, will by degrees become a coloffus sufficiently powerful to upset every mind and overthrow empires. Deism is a system at which the human mind cannot stop long; founded upon a chimera, sooner or later, it will be seen to degenerate into an absurd and dangerous superstition.

Many incredulous beings, and many deists are met with in those countries where liberty of thought reigns; that is to say, where the civil power has known how to counterbalance superstition. But above all, atheists will be found in those nations, where superstition, backed by the sovereign authority, makes the weight of its yoke felt, and impudently abuses its unlimited power*. Indeed, when in these
kind

* Atheists are, it is said, more rare in ENGLAND and in protestant countries, where toleration is established, than in Roman catholic countries, where the princes are commonly intolerant and enemies to the liberty of thought. In JAPAN, in TURKEY, in ITALY, and above all in ROME, many atheists are found. The more power
superstition

kind of countries science, talents, the seeds of reflection are not entirely stifled; the greater part of the men who think, revolt at the crying abuses of religion, at its multifarious follies, at the corruption and the tyranny of its priests, at those chains which it imposes, believing, with reason, that they can never remove themselves too far from its principles; the god who serves for the basis of such a religion,

superstition has, the more those minds which it has not been able to subdue will revolt against it. It is ITALY that produced JORDANO BRUNO, CAMPANELLA, VANINI, &c. There is every reason to believe, that had it not been for the persecutions and ill treatment of the synagogue, SPINOSA would never have perhaps imagined his system. It may also be presumed, that the horrors produced in ENGLAND by fanaticism, which cost CHARLES THE FIRST his head, pushed HOBBS on to atheism; the indignation which he conceived at the power of the priests, also perhaps, suggested his principles so favourable to the absolute power of kings. He believed that it were more expedient for a state to have a single civil despot, a sovereign over religion itself, than to have a multitude of spiritual tyrants, always ready to disturb it. SPINOSA, seduced by the ideas of HOBBS, fell into the same error in his TRACTATUS THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS, as well as in his treatise de JURE ECCLESIASTICORUM.

becomes as odious to them as the religion itself ; if this oppresses them they ascribe it to God, they feel that a terrible, jealous, and vindictive god, will be served by cruel ministers ; consequently, this god becomes a detestable object to every enlightened and honest mind amongst whom are always found the love of equity, liberty, humanity, and indignation against tyranny. Oppression gives a spring to the soul, it obliges man to examine closely the cause of his sorrows ; misfortune is a powerful incentive, that turns the mind to the side of truth. How formidable must not irritated reason be to falsehood ? It tears from it its masque, it follows it even into its last entrenchment ; it at least inwardly enjoys its confusion.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

OF THE MOTIVES WHICH LEAD TO ATHEISM :

CAN THIS SYSTEM BE DANGEROUS? CAN
IT BE EMBRACED BY THE UNINFORMED?

THESE reflections, and these facts will furnish us wherewith to reply to those who ask what interest men have in not admitting a god? The tyrannies, the persecutions, the numberless outrages committed in the name of this god, the stupidity and the slavery into which the ministers of this god every where plunge the people; the bloody disputes to which this god gives birth; the number of unhappy beings with which his fatal idea fills the world, are they then not motives sufficiently powerful, sufficiently interesting to determine all sensible men, and who are capable of thinking, to examine the titles of a being who causes so many evils to the inhabitants of the earth?

A THEIST

A THEIST, very estimable for his talents, asks, *if there can be any other cause than an evil disposition which can make men atheists* *? I say to him, yes, there are other causes; there is the desire of having a knowledge of interesting truths; there is the powerful interest of knowing what opinion to hold upon the object which is announced to us as the most important; there is the fear of deceiving ourselves upon the being who occupies himself with the opinions of men, and who does not permit that they should deceive themselves respect-

* See LORD SHAFTESBURY in his LETTER ON ENTHUSIASM. SPENCER says, that "it is by the cunning
" of the devil who strives to render the Divinity hateful,
" that he is represented to us under that revolting cha-
" racter which renders him like unto the head of Medusa,
" inasmuch that men are sometimes obliged to plunge
" into atheism, in order to disengage themselves from
" this hideous dæmon." But it might be said to SPENCER, that *the dæmon who strives to render the Divinity hateful* is the interest of the clergy, which was in all times, and in every country, to terrify men, in order to make them the slaves and the instruments of their passions. A god who should not make men tremble would be of no use whatever to the priests.

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ing him with impunity. But when these motives or these causes should not subsist, are not indignation, or, if they will, an *evil disposition*, legitimate causes, good and powerful motives, for closely examining the pretensions and the rights of an invincible tyrant, in whose name so many crimes are committed on the earth? Can, then, any man, who thinks, who feels, who has any spring in his soul, prevent himself from being incensed against an austere despot, who visibly is the pretext and the source of all those evils with which the human species is assailed on every side? Is it not this fatal god who is at once the cause and the pretext of that iron yoke which oppresses men, of that slavery in which they live, of that blindness which covers them, of that superstition which disgraces them, of those irrational customs which torment them, of those quarrels which divide them, of those outrages which they experience? must not every soul in which humanity is not extinguished, irritate itself against a phantom, who in every country is made to speak only like a capricious, inhuman, and irrational tyrant?

To motives so natural, we shall join those which are still more urgent and personal, to every man who reflects. Can there be a stronger than that troublesome fear, which must have birth, and be unceasingly nourished by the idea of an humour-some god, so touchy, that he irritates himself against man, even for his most secret thoughts, who can be offended without our knowing it, and whom we are never certain of pleasing; who, moreover, is not restrained by any of the ordinary rules of justice, who oweth nothing to the feeble work of his hands, who permitteth his creatures to have unhappy propensities, who giveth them liberty to follow them, to the end that he may have the odious satisfaction of punishing them for faults, which he suffers them to commit? What can be more reasonable, and more just, than to verify the existence, the qualities, and the rights, of a judge who is so severe that he will everlastingly avenge the crimes of a moment? Would it not be the height of folly, to wear without inquietude, like the greater number of mortals, the overwhelming yoke of a god, always ready
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to crush us in his fury. The frightful qualities with which the divinity is disfigured, by those impostors who announce his decrees, oblige every rational being to drive him from his heart, to shake off his detestable yoke, to deny the existence of a god, who is rendered hateful, by the conduct which is ascribed to him ; to scorn a god who is rendered ridiculous by those fables, which in every country are detailed of him. If there existed a god who was jealous of his glory, the crime the most calculated to irritate him would unquestionably be the blasphemy of those knaves who unceasingly paint him under the most revolting characters ; this god ought to be much more offended against his hideous ministers than against those who deny his existence. The phantom which superstition adores, while cursing him at the bottom of his heart, is an object so terrible that every wise man who meditates upon it, is obliged to refuse him his homage, to hate him, to prefer annihilation to the fear of falling into his cruel hands. *It is frightful,* the fanatic cries out to us, *to fall into the*

hands of the living God; and in order that he may escape falling into them, the man who thinks maturely, will throw himself into the arms of nature; and it is there alone that he will find a safe asylum against those continual storms, which supernatural ideas produce in the mind.

The deist will not fail to tell the atheist that God is not such as superstition paints him. But the atheist will reply to him, that superstition itself, and all the absurd and prejudicial notions, to which it gives birth, are only corollaries of those false and obscure principles, which are held respecting the divinity. That his incomprehensibility suffices to authorise the incomprehensible absurdities and mysteries which are told of him, that these mysterious absurdities flow necessarily from an absurd chimera which can only give birth to other chimeras, which the bewildered imagination of mortals will incessantly multiply. This fundamental chimera must be annihilated to assure the repose of man, that he may know his true relations and his duties, to procure him that serenity of soul without which there is no happiness

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on the earth. If the god of the superstitious be revolting and mournful, the god of the theist will always be a contradictory being, who will become fatal, when he shall be disposed to meditate on him, or with which, sooner or later, imposture will not fail to abuse him. Nature alone, and the truths which she discovers to us, are capable of giving to the mind and to the heart, a firmness, which falsehood will not be able to shake.

Let us again reply to those who unceasingly repeat, that the interest of the passions alone, conduct us to atheism, and that it is the fear of punishments to come, that determine corrupt men to make efforts to annihilate this judge whom they have reason to dread. We shall, without hesitation, agree that they are the interests and the passions of men, which excite them to make enquiries; without interest no man is tempted to seek; without passion no man will seek vigorously. The question, then, to be examined here, is, if the passions and interests which determine some thinkers to exa-

mine the rights of God are legitimate or not? We have exposed these interests, and we have found that every rational man finds in his inquietudes and his fears, reasonable motives, to ascertain, whether or not it be necessary to pass his life in perpetual fears and agonies? Will it be said, that an unhappy being, unjustly condemned to groan in chains, has not the right of desiring to break them, or to take some means of liberating himself from his prison, and from those punishments which menace him at each instant? Will it be pretended that his passion for liberty has no legitimate foundation, and that he doth an injury to the companions of his misery, in withdrawing himself from the strokes of tyranny, and in furnishing them with assistance to escape from these strokes also? Is, then, an incredulous man any thing more than one who has escaped from the general prison in which tyrannical imposture detains all mankind? Is not an atheist who writes, one that has escaped, and who furnishes to those of his associates who have sufficient courage to follow him, the means

means of setting themselves free from the terrors which menace them*?

We shall also agree, that frequently the corruption of morals, debauchery, licentiousness, and even levity of mind, can conduct men to irreligion or to incredulity; but it is possible to be a libertine, irreligious, and to make a parade of incredulity, without

* The priests unceasingly repeat that it is pride, vanity, and the desire of distinguishing himself from the generality of mankind, that determines man to incredulity. In this they act like the great, who treat all those as insolent, who refuse to cringe before them. Would not every rational man have a right to ask a priest, where is thy superiority in matters of reasoning? What motives can I have to submit my reason to thy delirium? On the other hand, may it not be said to the clergy that it is interest which makes them priests; that it is interest which renders them theologians; that it is the interest of their passions, of their pride, of their avarice, of their ambition, &c. which attaches them to their systems, of which they alone reap the benefit? Whatever it may be, the priests, contented with exercising their empire over the uninformed, ought to permit those men who think, not to bend their knee before their vain idols. TERTULLIAN has said, *quis enim philosophum sacrificare compellit!*

See TERTULL. APOLOG. Chap. 614.
being

being an atheist on that account ; there is unquestionably a difference betwixt those who are conducted to irreligion by dint of reasoning, and those who reject or despise religion, only because they look upon it as a melancholy object, or an incommodious restraint. Many people renounce received prejudices through vanity, or upon hearsay ; these pretended strong minds, have examined nothing for themselves, they act on the authority of others, whom they suppose to have weighed things more maturely. This sort of incredulous beings have not, then, any certain ideas, and are but little capacitated to reason for themselves ; they are hardly in a state to follow the reasoning of others. They are irreligious in the same manner as the majority of men are religious, that is to say, by credulity, like the people, or through interest, like the priests. A voluptuary, a debauchee, buried in drunkenness ; an ambitious mortal, an intriguer, a frivolous and dissipated man, a loose woman, a choice spirit of the day, are they personages really capable of judging of a religion which they have not deeply examined and maturely weighed,

weighed, of feeling the force of an argument, of compassing the whole of a system? If they sometimes discover some faint glimmerings of truth amidst the tempest of their passions, which blind them, these leave on them only some evanescent traces, no sooner received than obliterated. Corrupt men attack the gods only when they conceive them to be the enemies of their passions*. The honest man attacks them because he finds they are inimical to virtue, injurious to his happiness, contradictory to his repose, and fatal to the human species.

Whenever our will is moved by concealed and complicated motives, it is extremely

* ARRIAN says, that when men imagine the gods are in opposition to their passions, they abuse them and overturn their altars.

The bolder the sentiments of an atheist, and the more strange and suspicious they appear to other men, the more strictly and scrupulously he ought to observe and to perform his duties, especially if he be not desirous that his morals should *calumniate* his systems, which duly weighed, will make the necessity and the certitude of morality felt, and which every species of religion tends to render problematical, or to corrupt.

difficult to decide what determines it; a wicked man may be conducted to irreligion or to atheism by those motives which he dare not avow even to himself: he may form to himself an illusion and only follow the interest of his passions, in believing he seeks after truth; the fear of an avenging god will perhaps determine him to deny his existence without much examination, uniformly because he is incommodious to him. Nevertheless the passions happen by chance to be sometimes just; a great interest carries us on to examine things more closely; it may frequently make a discovery of the truth, even to him who seeks after it the least, or who is only desirous of being lulled asleep, and of deceiving himself. It is the same with a perverse man who stumbles upon the truth, as it is with him who flying from an imaginary danger, should find in his road a dangerous serpent, which in his haste he should kill; he does that by accident, and, to say thus, without design, which a man less troubled in his mind would have done with premeditated deliberation. A wicked man who fears his
god,

god, and who would escape from him, may certainly discover the absurdity of those notions which are entertained of him, without discovering for that reason, that those same notions in no wise change or alter the evidence and the necessity of his duties.

To judge properly of things, it is necessary to be disinterested; it is necessary to have an enlightened and connected mind, to compass a great system. It belongs only to the honest man, to examine the proofs of the existence of a god, and the principles of religion; it belongs only to the man acquainted with nature and its ways, to embrace with intelligence the cause of the System of Nature. The wicked and the ignorant are incapable of judging with candour; the honest and virtuous are alone competent judges in so weighty an affair. What do I say? is not the virtuous man from thence in the situation of desiring the existence of a god, who remunerates the goodness of men? If he renounce these advantages which his virtue gives him the right to hope for, it is because he finds them imaginary, as well as the remunerator who is

announced to him, and that in reflecting on the character of this god, he is obliged to acknowledge that it is not possible to reckon upon a capricious despot, and that the enormities and follies to which he serves as a pretext, infinitely surpass the pitiful advantages that can result from his idea. Indeed every man who reflects, quickly perceives that for one timid mortal of whom this god restrains the feeble passions, there are millions whom he cannot curb, and of whom, on the contrary, he excites the fury; for one that he consoles, there are millions whom he affrights, whom he afflicts, whom he obliges to groan; in short, he finds that against one inconsistent enthusiast, which this god, whom he believes good, renders happy, he carries discord, carnage, and affliction into vast countries, and plunges whole people in grief and tears.

However it may be, do not let us enquire the motives which may determine a man to embrace a system: let us examine the system, let us convince ourselves if it be true, and if we shall find it founded upon truth, we never shall be able to esteem it dangerous.

It

It is always falsehood which injures men ; if error be visibly the source of their sorrows, reason is the true remedy for them. Do not let us farther examine the conduct of a man who presents us with a system ; his ideas, as we have already said, may be extremely sound, when even his notions are highly deserving censure. If the system of atheism cannot render him perverse who is not so by his temperament, it cannot render him good who does not otherwise know the motives which should conduct him to virtue. At least, we have proved that the superstitious man, when he has strong passions and a depraved heart, finds even in his religion a thousand pretexts, more than the atheist, for injuring the human species. The atheist has not, at least, the mantle of zeal to cover his vengeance, his transports, and his fury ; the atheist has not the faculty of expiating, at the expence of money, or by the aid of certain ceremonies, the outrages which he commits against society ; he has not the advantage of being able to reconcile himself with his god, and by some easy custom, to quiet the remorse of his disturbed conscience ; if
crime

crime has not deadened every feeling of his heart, he is obliged continually to carry within himself an inexorable judge, who unceasingly reproaches him for his odious conduct, who forces him to blush, to hate himself, and to fear the looks and the resentment of others. The superstitious man, if he be wicked, gives himself up to crime with remorse; but his religion quickly furnishes him with the means of getting rid of it; his life is generally no more than a long series of error and grief, of sin and expiation; still more, he frequently commits, as we have already seen, crimes of greater magnitude, in order to expiate the first: destitute of any permanent ideas of morality, he accustoms himself to look upon nothing as a crime, but that which the ministers and the interpreters of his god forbid him to commit: he considers as virtues, or as the means of effacing his transgressions, actions of the blackest dye, which are frequently held out to him as agreeable to this god. It is thus we have seen fanatics expiate, by the most atrocious persecutions, their adulteries, their infamy, their unjust wars, and their usurpations; and,

and, to wash away their iniquities, bathe themselves in the blood of those superstitious beings, whose infatuation made them victims and martyrs.

An atheist, if he has reasoned justly, if he has consulted nature, hath principles more certain, and always more humane, than the superstitious; his religion, whether gloomy or enthusiastic, always conducts the latter either to folly or to cruelty. The imagination of an atheist will never be intoxicated to that degree, to make him believe that violence, injustice, persecution, or assassination, are virtuous or legitimate actions. We every day see that religion, or the cause of heaven, hoodwinks those persons who are humane, equitable, and rational, on every other occasion, so much, that they make it a duty to treat with the utmost barbarity those men who step aside from their mode of thinking. An heretic, an incredulous being, ceases to be a man in the eyes of the superstitious. Every society, infected with the venom of religion, offers us innumerable examples of juridical assassinations, which the tribunals commit without scruple, and
without

without remorse ; judges, who are equitable on every other occasion, are no longer so as soon as there is a question of theological chimeras ; in bathing themselves in blood, they believe they conform to the views of the divinity. Almost every where, the laws are subordinate to superstition, and make themselves accomplices in its fury ; they legitimate or transform into duties those cruelties which are the most contrary to the rights of humanity*. Are not all these avengers of religion, who, with gaiety of heart, and through piety and duty, immolate to it those victims which it appoints, blind men ? Are they not tyrants, who have the injustice to violate thought, and who have the folly to believe they can enslave it ? Are they not fanatics on whom the law, dictated by inhuman prejudices, impose the necessity

* The president GRAMMON, relates, with a satisfaction truly worthy a cannibal, the particulars of the punishment of VANINI, who was burnt at TOULOUSE, although he had disavowed the opinions with which he was accused. This president even goes so far as to find the cries and howlings which the torment wrested from this unhappy victim of religious cruelty, wicked.

of becoming ferocious brutes? Are not all those sovereigns who, to avenge heaven, torment and persecute their subjects, and sacrifice human victims to the wickedness of their anthropophagite gods, men whom religious zeal has converted into tigers? Are not those priests, so careful of the soul's health, who insolently break into the sanctuary of the thoughts, to the end that they may find in the opinions of man motives for injuring him, odious knaves and disturbers of the mind's repose, whom religion honours, and whom reason detests? What villains are more odious in the eyes of humanity than those infamous INQUISITORS, who by the blindness of princes, enjoy the advantage of judging their own enemies, and of committing them to the flames? Nevertheless the superstition of the people makes them respected, and the favour of kings overwhelms them with kindness! In short, do not a thousand examples prove that religion has every where produced and justified the most unaccountable horrors? Has it not a thousand times armed men with the poniards of homicides, let loose passions much more terrible than those

which it pretended to restrain, and broken the most sacred bonds of mortals? Has it not, under the pretexts of duty, of faith, of piety, of zeal, favoured cruelty, stupidity, ambition, and tyranny? Has not the cause of God made murder, perfidy, perjury, rebellion, and regicide legitimate? Have not those princes who frequently have made themselves the avengers of heaven, the licitors of religion, hundreds of times been its victims? In short has not the name of God been the signal for the most dismal follies, and the most frightful and wicked outrages? Have not the altars of the gods every where swam in blood; and under whatever form they may have shewn the divinity, was he not always the cause or the pretext of the most insolent violation of the rights of humanity*?

Never

* It is right to remark that the religion of the CHRISTIANS which boasts of giving to men the most just ideas of the divinity; which every time that it is accused of being turbulent and sanguinary, only shews its god as on the side of goodness and mercy; which prides itself on having taught the purest system of morality; which pretends

to

Never will an atheist, as long as he enjoys his right senses, persuade himself that similar actions can be justifiable; never will he believe that he who commits them can be an estimable man; there is no

to have established for ever concord and peace amongst those who profess it: It is well, I say, to remark that it has caused more divisions and disputes, more political and civil wars, more crimes of every species, than all the other religions of the world united. It will perhaps be told us, that the progress of learning will prevent this superstition from producing in future such dismal effects as those which it has formerly done; we shall reply, that fanaticism will ever be equally dangerous, or that the cause not being removed, the effects will always be the same. Thus so long as superstition shall be held in consideration, and shall have power, there will be disputes, persecutions, inquisitions, regicides, disorders, &c. &c. So long as mankind shall be sufficiently irrational to look upon religion as a thing of the first importance to them, the ministers of religion will have the opportunity of confounding every thing on earth under the pretext of serving the interests of the divinity, which will never be other than their own peculiar interests. The CHRISTIAN church would only have one mode of wiping away the accusation, which is brought against it, of being intolerant or cruel, and that would be solemnly to declare *that it is not allowable to persecute or injure any one for his opinions*; but this is what its ministers will never declare.

one but a superstitious being, whose blindness makes him forget the most evident principles of morality, of nature, and of reason, who can possibly imagine that the most destructive crimes are virtues. If the atheist be perverse, he, at least, knows that he does wrong; neither God nor his priests will be able to persuade him that he does right, and whatever crimes he may allow himself to commit, he will never be capable of exceeding those which superstition causes to be committed, without scruple, by those whom it intoxicates with its fury, or to whom it shews crimes themselves, as expiations and meritorious actions,

Thus the atheist, however wicked he may be supposed to be, will at most, be only on a level with the devotee, whose religion frequently encourages him to commit crime which it transforms into virtue. As to conduct, if he be debauched, voluptuous, intemperate, adulterous, the atheist differs in nothing from the most credulous superstitious being, who frequently knows how to connect to his credulity those vices and crimes which his priests will always pardon him for,

for, provided he renders homage to their power. If he be in Hindostan, his bramins will wash him in the Ganges while reciting a prayer. If he be a Jew, upon making an offering, his sins will be effaced; if he be in Japan, he will be acquitted by performing a pilgrimage; if he be a Mahometan, he will be reputed a saint for having visited the tomb of his prophet; if he be a Christian, he will pray, he will fast, he will throw himself at the feet of his priests and confess his faults to them; these will give him absolution in the name of the Most High, will sell him the indulgencies of heaven, but never will they censure him for those crimes which he shall have committed for them.

We are every day told that the indecent or criminal conduct of the priests and of their sectaries proves nothing against the goodness of the religious system; wherefore do they not say the same thing of the conduct of the atheist, who, as we have already proven, may have a very good and very true system of morality, even while leading a dissolute life? If it be necessary to judge the opinions of mankind according to their conduct,

duct, which is the religion that would bear this scrutiny? Let us then examine the opinions of the atheist without approving of his conduct; let us adopt his mode of thinking, if we shall judge it to be true, useful, and rational; let us reject his mode of acting, if we shall find it blameable. At the sight of a work filled with truth, we do not embarrass ourselves with the morals of the workman. Of what importance is it to the universe whether NEWTON had been a sober or an intemperate, a chaste or a debauched man? It only remains for us to examine and know whether he has reasoned well, if his principles be certain, if the parts of his system are connected, if his work contains more demonstrable truths than bold ideas. Let us judge in the same manner of the principles of an atheist; if they are strange and unusual, that is a reason for examining them more strictly; if he has spoken truth, if he has demonstrated his positions, let us yield to the evidence; if he be deceived in some parts, let us distinguish the true from the false, but do not let us fall into the too common prejudice, which on account of one error

error in the detail, rejects a multitude of incontestible truths. The atheist, when he is deceived, has unquestionably as much right to throw his faults on the fragility of his nature as the superstitious man. An atheist may have vices and defects, he may reason badly ; but at least his errors will never have the consequences of religious novelties, they will not, like these, kindle up the fire of discord in the bosom of nations ; the atheist will not justify his vices and his wanderings by religion ; he will not pretend to infallibility, like those self-conceited theologians who attach the divine sanction to their follies, and who suppose that heaven authorizes those sophisms, those falsehoods, and those errors, which they believe themselves obliged to distribute over the face of the earth.

It will perhaps be told us that the refusal to believe in the divinity, will rend asunder one of the most powerful bonds of society, in making the sacredness of an oath vanish. I reply, that perjury is by no means rare in the most religious nations, nor even amongst those persons who make a boast of being the most convinced of the existence of
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the gods. DIAGORAS, superstitious as he was, became, it is said, an atheist on seeing that the gods had not thundered their vengeance on a man who had taken them as evidences to a falsity. Upon this principle, how many atheists ought to be made among us? From the principle which has made an invisible and an unknown being the depositary of man's engagements, we do not see it result that their engagements and their most solemn contracts are more solid for this vain formality. Conductors of nations, it is you above all, that I call upon to witness my assertions! This god, of whom ye say ye are the images, from whom ye pretend to hold the right of governing; this god, whom ye so often make the witness of your oaths, the guarantee of your treaties; this god, of whom ye declare ye fear the judgment, has he much weight with ye, whenever there is a question of the most futile interest? Do ye religiously observe those sacred engagements which ye have made with your allies, and with your subjects? Princes! who to so much religion frequently join so little probity, I see the power of
truth

truth overwhelms ye; without doubt, you blush at this question; and you are constrained to allow that you equally mock gods and men. What do I say? Does not religion itself frequently absolve you from your oaths? Does it not prescribe that you should be perfidious, and violate sworn faith, above all, when there is a question of its sacred interests, does it not order you to dispense with the engagements you have made with those whom it condemns? And after having rendered you perfidious and perjured, has it not sometimes arrogated the right of absolving your subjects from those oaths which bound them to you*! If we consider

* It is a maxim constantly received in the Roman Catholic religion, that is to say, in that sect of CHRISTIANITY, the most superstitious and the most numerous, *that no faith is to be held with heretics*. The general council of CONSTANCE decided thus, when, notwithstanding the emperor's passport, it decreed JOHN HUS, and JEROME of FRAGUE to be burnt. The ROMAN PONTIFF has, it is well known, the right of relieving his sectaries from their oaths, and annulling their vows; this same PONTIFF has frequently arrogated to

consider things attentively, we shall see, that under such chiefs, religion and politics are the schools of perjury. Therefore, knaves of every condition, never recoil when it is necessary to attest the name of God to the most manifest frauds, and for the vilest interests. What end then do oaths answer? They are snares in which simplicity alone can suffer itself to be caught; oaths are every where vain formalities, they impose nothing on villains, nor do they add any thing to the engagements of honest men who, without oaths, would not have had the temerity to violate them. A perfidious and perjured superstitious being, unquestionably has not any advantage over an atheist who should fail in his promises; neither the one nor the other any longer deserves the confidence of their fellow-citizens, nor the esteem of good men: if the

himself the right of deposing kings, and of absolving their subjects from their oaths of fidelity.

It is very extraordinary that oaths should be prescribed by the laws of those nations who profess the Christian religion, whilst CHRIST has expressly prohibited the use of them.

one does not respect his god in whom he believes, the other neither respects his reason, his reputation, nor public opinion, in which all rational men cannot refuse to believe *.

It has been frequently asked, if there were a nation that had no idea of the divinity, and if a people uniformly composed of atheists would be able to subsist? Whatever some speculators may say, it does not appear likely that there has been upon our globe a numerous people, who have not had an idea of some invisible power, to whom they have shewn marks of respect and submission†.

Man

* "An oath," says HOBBS, "adds nothing to an obligation, it only augments, in the imagination of him who swears, the fear of violating an engagement, which he would have been obliged to keep even without any oath."

† It has been sometimes believed that the CHINESE were ATHEISTS; but this error is due to the CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES, who are accustomed to treat all those as ATHEISTS who do not hold opinions similar with their own upon the divinity. It always appears that the CHINESE are a people extremely superstitious, but that they

Man, inasmuch as he is a fearful and ignorant animal, necessarily becomes superstitious in his misfortunes: either he forms a god for himself, or he admits the god which others are disposed to give him. It does not then appear that we can rationally suppose there may have been, or that there is, a people upon the earth a total stranger to the notion of some divinity. One will shew us the sun, or the moon and stars; the other will shew us the sea, the lakes, the rivers, which furnish him his subsistence; the trees which afford him an asylum against the inclemency of the air; another will shew us a rock of an odd form, an high mountain or volcano that frequently astonishes him; another will present you

are governed by chiefs who are by no means so, without, however, their being atheists for that reason. If the empire of CHINA be as flourishing as it is said to be, it, at least, furnishes a very forcible proof that those who govern have no occasion to be superstitious in order to govern, a people who is so, well.

It is pretended that the GREENLANDERS have no idea of the divinity. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe it of a nation so savage and so ill-treated by Nature.

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his crocodile, whose malignity he fears; his dangerous serpent, the reptile to which he attributes his good or his bad fortune. In short, each man will make you see his *whim* or his domestic and tutelary god with respect.

But from the existence of his gods, the savage does not draw the same inductions as the civilized and polished man; the savage does not believe it a duty to reason much upon his divinities; he does not imagine that they ought to influence his morals, nor entirely occupy his thoughts: content with a gross, simple, and exterior worship, he does not believe that these invisible powers trouble themselves with his conduct towards his fellow-creatures; in short, he does not connect his morality with his religion. This morality is coarse, as must be that of all ignorant people; it is proportioned to his wants, which are few; it is frequently irrational, because it is the fruit of ignorance, of inexperience, and of the passions of men, but slightly restrained, to say thus, in their infancy. It is only in numerous, stationary, and civilized societies, where

man's wants multiply themselves, and his interests clash, that he is obliged to have recourse to governments, to laws, and to public worship, in order to maintain concord: it is then that men draw near to each other, reason and combine their ideas, refine and subtilize their notions; it is then that those who govern them, avail themselves of the fear of invisible powers, to keep them within bounds, to render them docile, and oblige them to obey and live in peace. It is thus that, by degrees, morals and politics find themselves connected with religious systems. The chiefs of nations, frequently superstitious themselves, but little enlightened upon their own interests, but little versed in sound morality, and but little instructed in the true motive-powers of the human heart, believe that they have done every thing for their own authority as well as for the happiness and repose of society, in rendering their subjects superstitious, in menacing them with the wrath of their invisible phantoms, in treating them like children, who are appeased with fables and chimeras. By the assistance of these
marvellous

marvellous inventions, to which the chiefs and the conductors of nations are themselves frequently the dupes, and which are transmitted from one race to another, sovereigns are dispensed from the trouble of instructing themselves, they neglect the laws, they enervate themselves in ease and sloth, they follow nothing but their caprice, they repose in their deities the care of restraining their subjects; they confide the instruction of the people to priests, who are commissioned to render them good, submissive, and devout, and to teach them, in an early age, to tremble under the yoke of the visible and invisible gods.

It is thus that nations are kept, by their tutors, in a perpetual state of infancy, and are only restrained by vain chimeras. It is thus that politics, jurisprudence, education, and morality, are every where infected with superstition. It is thus that men no longer know any duties but those of religion; it is thus that the idea of virtue is falsely associated with that of those imaginary powers which imposture makes to speak according as it is disposed. It is thus that men are persuaded that without a god

there no longer exists any morality for them. It is thus that princes and subjects, equally blind to their true interests, to the duties of nature, and to their reciprocal rights, have habituated themselves to consider religion as necessary to morals, as indispensably requisite to govern men, and as the most certain means of arriving at power and happiness.

It is from these dispositions, of which we have so frequently demonstrated the falsity, that so many persons, otherwise extremely enlightened, look upon it as an impossibility, that a society of atheists could subsist for any length of time. It is not questionable that a numerous society, who should neither have religion, morality, government, laws, education, nor principles could not maintain itself, and that, it would simply draw together beings disposed to injure each other, or children who would only blindly follow the most fatal impulses; but with all the religion of the world, are not human societies very nearly in this state? Are not the sovereigns in almost every country, in a continual state
of

of warfare with their subjects? Are not these subjects, in despite of religion,¹ and those terrible notions which it gives them of the divinity, unceasingly occupied in reciprocally injuring each other, and rendering themselves unhappy? Does not religion itself, and its supernatural notions, unremittingly serve to flatter the vanity and the passions of sovereigns, and to throw oil into the fire of discord, between those citizens, who, are divided in opinion? Would those *infernal* powers, who are supposed to be ever upon the watch to injure the human species, be capable of producing greater evils upon the earth than fanaticism, and the fury to which theology gives birth? In short, could atheists, assembled together in society, however irrational they may be supposed to be, conduct themselves towards each other in a more criminal manner, than do these superstitious beings, filled with real vices and extravagant chimeras, who have, during so many ages, done nothing more than destroy themselves and cut each others' throats, without reason, and without pity? It cannot be pretended

they would ; on the contrary, we boldly assert, that a society of atheists, destitute of all religion, governed by good laws, formed by a good education, invited to virtue by recompenses, deterred from crime by equitable punishments, and disentangled from illusions, falsehood, and chimeras, would be infinitely more honest and more virtuous than those religious societies, in which every thing conspires to intoxicate the mind, and to corrupt the heart.

When we shall be disposed usefully to occupy ourselves with the happiness of men, it is with the gods of heaven that the reform must commence ; it is by abstracting these imaginary beings, destined to affright people who are ignorant and in a state of infancy, that we shall be able to promise ourselves to conduct man to his maturity. It cannot be too often repeated, there is no morality without consulting the nature of man and his true relations with the beings of his species ; no fixed principles for man's conduct in regulating it upon unjust, capricious, and wicked gods ; no sound politics, without consulting the nature of
man,

man, living in society, to satisfy his wants, and to assure his happiness and its enjoyment. No good government can found itself upon a despotic god, he will always make tyrants of his representatives. No laws will be good without consulting the nature and the end of society. No jurisprudence can be advantageous for nations, if it is regulated upon the caprice and passions of deified tyrants. No education will be rational, unless it be founded upon reason, and not upon chimeras and prejudices. In short, there is no virtue, no probity, no talents, under corrupt masters, and under the conduct of those priests who render men the enemies of themselves, and of others, and who seek to stifle in them the seeds of reason, science, and courage.

It will, perhaps, be asked, if we could reasonably flatter ourselves with ever arriving at the point of making a people entirely forget their religious opinions, or the ideas which they have of the divinity? I reply, that the thing appears utterly impossible, and that this is not the end which we can propose to ourselves. The idea of God, incul-

cated from the most tender infancy, does not appear of a nature capable of being eradicated from the mind of the majority of men: it would, perhaps, be as difficult to give it to those persons who, arrived at a certain age, should never have heard it spoken of, as to banish it from the heads of those who have been imbued with it from their earliest infancy. Thus it cannot be supposed, that it is possible to make a whole nation pass from the abyfs of superstition, that is to say, from the bosom of ignorance and of delirium, into absolute atheism, which supposes reflection, study, knowledge, a long series of experience, the habit of contemplating nature, the science of the causes of its various phænomena, of its combinations, of its laws, of the beings who compose it, and of their different properties. In order to be an atheist, or to be assured of the powers of nature, it is necessary to have meditated; a superficial glance of the eye will not make us acquainted with it; eyes but little exercised, will unceasingly be deceived; the ignorance of true causes will make us suppose those which are imaginary;

ginary ; and ignorance will thus re-convert the natural philosopher himself to the feet of a phantom, in which his limited sight, or his idleness, will believe he shall find the solution of every difficulty.

ATHEISM, as well as Philosophy and all profound and abstract sciences, then, is not calculated for the uninformed, neither for the majority of men. There is in all populous and civilized nations, persons whose circumstances enable them to meditate, to make researches, and useful discoveries, which, sooner or later, finish by extending themselves, and becoming beneficial when they have been judged advantageous and true. The geometrician, the mechanic, the chemist, the physician, the civilian, the artizan himself, labour in their closets or in their workshops to seek the means of serving society, each in his sphere ; nevertheless no one of these sciences or professions with which they are occupied are known to the uninformed, who however do not fail in the long run to profit by, and reap the advantages of those labours of which they have no idea. It is for the mariner that the astronomer

labours ; it is for him that the geometrician and the mechanic calculate ; it is for the mason and the labourer that the skilful architect draws learned designs. Whatever may be the pretended utility of religious opinions, the profound and subtle theologian cannot boast of labouring, of writing, or of disputing for the advantage of the people, whom, however, they make pay so exorbitantly for those systems and those mysteries which they will never understand, and which never can at any time be of any utility whatever to them.

It is not, then, for the many that a philosopher ought to propose to himself to write or to meditate. The principles of atheism, or the SYSTEM OF NATURE, are not even calculated, as we have made it felt, for a great number of persons, extremely enlightened on other points, but frequently too much prepossessed in favour of general prejudices. It is extremely rare to find men who, to an enlarged mind, extensive knowledge, and great talents, join either a well regulated imagination, or the courage necessary to combat successfully those habitual chimeras

chimeras with which the brain has been long penetrated. A secret and invincible inclination frequently reconduct, in despite of all reasoning, the most solid and the best fortified minds to those prejudices which they see generally established, and of which they have themselves drank copiously from the most tender infancy. Nevertheless, by degrees, those principles which then appear strange or revolting, when they have truth on their side, insinuate themselves into the mind, become familiar, extend themselves far and wide, and produce the most advantageous effects over every society: in time, men familiarize themselves with those ideas which originally they had looked upon as absurd and irrational; at least they cease to consider those as odious who profess these opinions upon things of which experience makes it seen they may be permitted to have doubts without danger to the public.

The diffusion of ideas, then, amongst men, is not to be feared. Are they useful? By degrees they will fructify. Every man who writes, must neither fix his eyes upon the time in which he lives, nor upon his actual fellow-citizens, nor upon the country which
he

he inhabits. He must speak to the human species, he must foresee future generations; in vain will he expect the applauses of his contemporaries; in vain shall he flatter himself with seeing his early and forward principles received kindly by prejudiced minds; if he has told truth, the ages that shall follow will render justice to his efforts; meantime, let him content himself with the idea of having done well, or with the secret suffrages of those few friends to truth who inhabit the earth. It is after his death that the writer of truth triumphs; it is then that the stings of hatred and the shafts of envy, either exhausted or blunted, give place to truth, which being eternal, must survive all the errors of the earth *.

Besides,

* It is a problem with a great many people, if TRUTH may not be injurious. The best intentioned persons are themselves frequently in incertitude upon this important point. TRUTH never injures any but those who deceive men: these have the greatest interest in being undeceived. TRUTH may be injurious to him who announces it, but no TRUTH can possibly injure the human species, and never can it be too clearly announced to beings always little disposed to listen to or comprehend it. If all
those

Besides, we shall say, with HOBBS, "That
" we cannot do men any harm by proposing
" our ideas to them ; the worst mode is to
" leave them in doubt and dispute ; indeed
" are they not so already ? " If an author
who writes be deceived, it is because he
may have reasoned badly. Has he laid
down false principles ? It remains to ex-
amine them. Is his system false and ridicu-
lous ? It will serve to make truth appear

those who write to announce important truths, *which are
always considered as the most dangerous*, were sufficiently
warmed with the public welfare to speak freely, even at
the risque of displeasing their readers, the human race
would be much more enlightened and much happier than
it is. To write in ambiguous words, is frequently to write
to nobody. The human mind is idle, we must spare it as
much as possible the trouble and embarrassment of reflect-
ing. What time and study does it not require at the
present day to unravel the ambiguous oracles of the
ancient philosophers, whose true sentiments are almost
entirely lost to us ! If TRUTH be useful to men, it is an
injustice to deprive them of it ; if TRUTH ought to be
admitted, we must admit its consequences, which also are
TRUTHS. Men, for the most part, are fond of TRUTH,
but its consequences inspire them with so much fear,
that frequently they prefer remaining in ERROR, of which
habit prevents them from feeling the deplorable effects.

in its greatest splendour; his work will fall into contempt; and the writer, if he be witness to its fall, will be sufficiently punished for his temerity; if he be dead, the living cannot disturb his ashes. No man writes with a design to injure his fellow-creatures; he always proposes to himself to merit their suffrages, either by amusing them, by exciting their curiosity, or by communicating to them discoveries which he believes useful. No work can be dangerous; above all, if it contains TRUTH. It would not be so even if it contained principles evidently contrary to experience and good sense. Indeed, what would result from a work that should now tell us the sun is not luminous; that parricide is legitimate; that robbery is allowable; that adultery is not a crime? The smallest reflection would make us feel the falsity of these principles, and the whole human race would protest against them. Men would laugh at the folly of the author, and presently his book and his name would be known only by their ridiculous extravagances. There is nothing but religious follies that are pernicious to

I mortals;

mortals ; and for why ? It is because authority always pretends to establish them by violence, to make them pass for virtues, and rigorously punishes those who should be disposed to laugh at, or to examine them. If men were more rational, they would consider religious opinions and theological systems with the same eyes as systems of natural philosophy, or problems in geometry : these latter never disturb the repose of society, although they sometimes excite very warm disputes amongst some of the learned. Theological quarrels would never be attended with any evil consequences, if men could arrive at the desirable point of making those who have power in their hands, feel that they ought not to have any other sensations than those of indifference and contempt, for the disputes of persons who do not, themselves, understand the marvellous questions upon which they never cease disputing.

It is, at least, this indifference, so just, so rational, so advantageous for states, that sound philosophy can propose to introduce by degrees upon the earth. Would not the human species be much hap-

pier, if the sovereigns of the world, occupied with the welfare of their subjects, and leaving to superstition, its futile contests, submitted religion to politics; obliged its haughty ministers to become citizens; and carefully prevented their quarrels from interesting the public tranquillity? What advantages would there not result to science, to the progress of the human mind, to the perfecting of morality, of jurisprudence, of legislation, of education, from the liberty of thought? At present, genius every where finds shackles; religion continually opposes itself to its course: man, enveloped with bandages, does not enjoy any one of his faculties; his mind itself is tortured, and appears continually wrapped up in the swaddling clothes of infancy. The civil power, leagued with the spiritual power, appears disposed to rule only over brutalized slaves, confined in an obscure prison, where they make each other reciprocally feel the effects of their ill-humour. Sovereigns detest liberty of thought, because they fear truth; this truth appears formidable to them, because it would condemn their excesses; these excesses are dear to them, because
they

they know, no more than their subjects, their true interests, which ought to blend themselves into one.

Let not the courage of the philosopher be abated by so many united obstacles, which appear to exclude, for ever, truth from its dominion; reason, from the mind of man; and nature, from its rights. The thousandth part of those cares which are taken to infect the human mind, would be sufficient to make it whole. Do not then let us despair of his evils; do not let us do man the injury to believe that truth is not made for him; his mind seeks after it incessantly; his heart desires it; his happiness demands it loudly; he fears it, or mistakes it, only because religion, which has overthrown all his ideas, perpetually keeps the bandeau of delusion over his eyes, and strives to render him a total stranger to virtue.

Maugre the prodigious pains which are taken to drive truth, reason, and science, from the residence of mortals; time, assisted by the progressive knowledge of ages, may be able one day to enlighten even those princes whom we see so outrageous
against

against truth, such enemies to justice and to the liberty of mankind. Destiny will, perhaps, one day conduct them to the throne of enlightened, equitable, courageous, and benevolent sovereigns, who, acknowledging the true source of human miseries, shall attempt to apply to them the remedies with which their wisdom will furnish them: perhaps they will feel that those gods, from whom they pretend they derive their power, are the true scourges of their people; that the ministers of these gods are their own enemies and rivals; that the religion which they look upon as the support of their power, does, in fact, only weaken and shake it; that superstitious morality is false, and serves only to pervert their subjects, and to give them the vices of slaves, in lieu of the virtues of the citizen; in short, they will see in religious errors, the fruitful source of the sorrows of the human species; they will feel that they are incompatible with every equitable administration.

Until this desirable epoch for humanity, the principles of NATURALISM will be adopted only by a small number of thinkers; they

they cannot flatter themselves with having a great many approvers or profelytes; on the contrary, they will find ardent adversaries, or contemners, even in those persons who, upon every other subject, discover the most acute minds, and display the greatest knowledge. Those men who have the greatest share of talents, as we have already observed, cannot resolve to divorce themselves completely from their religious ideas; imagination, so necessary to splendid talents, frequently forms in them an insurmountable obstacle to the total destruction of prejudice; it depends much more on the judgment than on the mind. To this disposition, already so prompt to form illusions for them, is also joined the power of habit; to a great many men it would be wresting from them a portion of themselves, to take away their ideas of God; it would be depriving them of an accustomed aliment; it would be plunging them into a vacuum, and obliging their disturbed mind to perish for want of exercise *.

Let

* MENAGE has remarked, that history speaks of very few incredulous women, or female atheists. This is not surprizing

Let us not, then, be surprized if very great and learned men obstinately shut their eyes, or run counter to their ordinary sagacity, every time there is a question respecting an object which they have not the courage to examine with that attention which they have lent to many others. Lord Chancellor BACON, pretends *that a little philosophy disposes men to atheism, but that great depth re-conducts them to religion.* If we will analyze this proposition, we shall find it to signify, that very moderate and indifferent thinkers are quickly enabled to perceive the gross absurdities of religion, but that little accustomed to meditate, or destitute of those certain principles which could serve to guide them, their imagination presently replaces them in the theological labyrinth, from whence

surprizing, their organization renders them fearful, the nervous system undergoes periodical variations in them, and the education which they receive, disposes them to credulity. Those amongst them who have a sound constitution, and imagination, have occasion for chimeras suitable to occupy their idleness; above all, when the world abandons them, devotion and its ceremonies then becomes a business or an amusement for them.

reason

reason, too weak, appeared disposed to withdraw them. Timid souls fear even to take courage again; minds accustomed to be satisfied with theological solutions, no longer see in nature any thing but an inexplicable ænigma, an abyss which it is impossible to fathom. Habituated to fix their eyes upon an ideal and mathematical point, which they have made the center of every thing, the universe becomes a jumble to them, whenever they lose sight of it; and in the confusion in which they find themselves involved, they rather prefer returning to the prejudices of their infancy, which appear to explain every thing, than to float in the vacuum, or quit that foundation which they judge to be immoveable. Thus the proposition of BACON, appears to indicate nothing, except it be, that the most experienced persons cannot defend themselves against the illusions of their imagination, the impetuosity of which resists the strongest reasoning.

Nevertheless, a deliberate study of nature, is sufficient to undeceive every man who will consider things with a calm eye: he will see that every thing in the world is

connected by links invisible to the superficial and to the too impetuous observer, but extremely intelligible to him who views things with coolness. He will find that the most unusual, and the most marvellous, as well as the most trifling and ordinary effects are equally inexplicable, but must flow from natural causes, and that supernatural causes, under whatever name they may be designated, with whatever qualities they may be decorated, will do no more than increase difficulties, and make chimeras multiply. The simplest observations will invincibly prove to him that every thing is necessary, that the effects which he perceives are material, and can only originate in causes of the same nature, when even he should not be able, by the assistance of the senses, to recur to these causes. Thus his mind will every where shew him nothing but matter acting sometimes in a manner which his organs permit him to follow, and sometimes in a mode imperceptible to him: he will see that all beings follow constant and invariable laws, all combinations form and destroy themselves, all forms change, and that the great whole ever remains the same. Then

cured of the notions with which he was imbued, undeceived in those erroneous ideas, which, from habit, he attached to imaginary beings, he will consent to be ignorant of that which his organs cannot compass; he will know that obscure terms, devoid of sense, are not calculated to explain difficulties; and, guided by reason, he will throw aside all the hypotheses of the imagination, to attach himself to those realities which are confirmed by experience.

The greater number of those who study nature, frequently do not consider, that with the eyes of prejudice, they will never discover more than that which they have resolved before-hand to find; as soon as they perceive facts contrary to their ideas, they quickly turn from the contemplation of them; they believe their eyes have deceived them; or else, if they turn back, it is in hopes to be able to reconcile them with those notions with which their mind is imbued. It is thus that we find enthusiastic philosophers, whose prepossessions shew them, even in those things which most openly contradict their opinions, incontestible proofs of those systems with which they are pre-occupied.

From thence those pretended demonstrations of the existence of a good god, which are drawn from final causes, from the order of nature, from his kindness to man, &c. &c. Do these same enthusiasts perceive disorder, calamities, revolutions? They draw new proofs from the wisdom, the intelligence, the bounty of their god, whilst all these things appear as visibly to contradict these qualities, as the first appear to confirm or to establish them. These prejudiced observers, are in an extacy at the sight of the periodical motion and order of the stars, the productions of the earth, the astonishing harmony of the parts of animals; they forget then the laws of motion, the powers of attraction and repulsion, and of gravitation, and assign all these great phænomena to an unknown cause of which they have no idea! In short, in the heat of their imagination, they place man in the center of nature; they believe him to be the object and the end of all that exists; that it is for him that every thing is made; that it is to rejoice and please him that every thing has been created; whilst they do not perceive that very frequently

quently the whole of nature appears to be loosed against him and destiny obstinately persists in rendering him the most miserable of beings*.

Atheism is only so rare because every thing conspires to intoxicate man, from his most tender age, with a dazzling enthusiasm, or to puff him up with a systematic and arranged ignorance, which is of all ignorance the most difficult to vanquish and to root out. Theology is nothing more than a science of words, which by dint of repeating we accustom ourselves to substitute for things; as soon as we are disposed to analyze them, we find that they do not present us with any true sense. There are very few men in the world who think, who render themselves an account of their ideas,

* The progress of sound philosophy will always be fatal to superstition, which nature will continually contradict. ASTRONOMY has caused judiciary astrology to vanish; EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, the study of NATURAL HISTORY and CHEMISTRY, render it impossible for jugglers, priests, and forcerers, to perform miracles. NATURE, deeply studied, must necessarily cause that phantom, which ignorance has substituted in its place, to disappear.

and

and who have penetrating eyes ; justness of mind is one of the rarest gifts which nature bestows on the human species *. Too lively an imagination, a precipitate curiosity, are as powerful obstacles to the discovery of truth, as too much phlegm, as a slow conception, as indolence of mind, as the want of a thinking habit. All men have, more or less, imagination, curiosity, phlegm, bile, indolence, activity, it is from the just equilibrium, which nature has observed in their organization, that justness of mind depends. Nevertheless, as we have heretofore said,

* It is not to be understood here that nature has any choice in the formation of its beings, it is merely to be considered that the circumstances, which enable the junction of a certain quantity of those atoms or parts necessary to form an human machine, in such due proportions that one disposition shall not overbalance the others, and thus render the judgment erroneous by giving it a particular bias, very rarely occur—We know the process of making gunpowder ; nevertheless it will sometimes happen, that the ingredients have been so happily blended, that this destructive article is of a superior quality to the general produce of the manufactory, without, however, the chemist being on that account entitled to any particular commendation ; circumstances have been favourable, and these seldom happen.

the

the organization of man is subject to change, and the judgment of his mind varies with the changes which his machine is obliged to undergo: from thence those almost perpetual revolutions which take place in the ideas of mortals, above all, when there is a question concerning those of objects upon which experience does not furnish them with any fixed basis whereon to support them.

To seek and discover truth, which every thing strives to conceal from us, and which, the accomplices of those who lead us astray, we are frequently disposed to dissimulate to ourselves, or which our habitual terrors make us fear to find, there needs a just mind, an upright heart, in good faith with itself, and an imagination tempered with reason. With these dispositions, we shall discover truth; it never shews itself either to the enthusiast, smitten with his reveries; to the superstitious being, nourished with melancholy; to the vain man, puffed up with his presumptuous ignorance; to the man devoted to dissipation and to his pleasures; or to the reasoner, disingenuous with himself, who is
only

only disposed to form illusions to his mind. With these dispositions the attentive philosopher, the geometrician, the moralist, the politician, the theologian himself, when he shall sincerely seek truth, will find that the angular stone, which serves for the foundation of all religious systems, evidently supports falsehood. The philosopher will find in matter, a sufficient cause of his existence, of his motion, of his combination, of his modes of acting, always regulated by general laws incapable of varying. The geometrician will calculate the powers of matter, and without quitting nature, he will find that, to explain its phenomena, it is not necessary to have recourse to a being or to a power incommensurable with all the known powers. The politician, instructed in the true motive-powers which can act on the mind of nations, will feel that it is not necessary to recur to imaginary motive-powers, whilst there are real ones to act upon the will of the citizens, and to determine them to labour to the maintenance of their association; he will acknowledge that a fictitious motive-power is only calculated to slacken or disturb the
motion

motion of a machine so complicated as that of society. He who shall be more smitten with truth than with the subtilties of theology, will quickly perceive that this vain science is nothing more than an unintelligible heap of false hypotheses, begging of principles, of sophisms, of vitiated circles, of futile distinctions, of captious subtilities, of disingenuous arguments, from which it is not possible there should result any thing but puerilities, or endless disputes. In short, all men who shall have found ideas of morality, of virtue, of that which is useful to man in society, whether to conserve himself, or to conserve the body of which he is a member, will acknowledge that men, in order to discover their relations and their duties, have only to consult their own nature, and ought to be particularly careful not to found them upon a contradictory being, or to borrow them from a model which will do no more than disturb their minds and render them uncertain of their proper mode of acting.

Thus every rational thinker, in renouncing his prejudices, may feel the inutility and

the fallity of so many abstract systems which hitherto have only served to confound all our notions and render doubtful the clearest truths. In re-entering his proper sphere, and quitting the regions of the empyræum, where his mind can only bewilder itself; in consulting reason, man will discover that of which he needs a knowledge, and undeceive himself of those chimerical causes which enthusiasm, ignorance, and falsehood, have every where substituted to true causes and to real motive-powers, that act in a nature, out of which the human mind can never ramble without going astray, and without rendering itself miserable.

The DEICOLISTS, and their theologians, unceasingly reproach their adversaries, with their taste for PARADOXES or for SYSTEMS, whilst they themselves found all their ideas upon imaginary hypotheses, and make a principle of renouncing experience, of despising nature, of setting down as of no account the evidence of their senses, and of submitting their understanding to the yoke of authority. Would not then the DISCIPLES OF NATURE be justified in saying to them: "We only
" assure

“ assure ourselves of that which we see;
 “ we yield to nothing but evidence; if we
 “ have a system, it is founded only upon facts.
 “ We perceive in ourselves and every where
 “ else nothing but matter, and we conclude
 “ from it, that matter can feel and think.
 “ We see every thing operate itself in the
 “ world after mechanical laws, by the pro-
 “ perties, by the combination, by the modi-
 “ fication of matter, and we seek no other
 “ explication of the phænomena with which
 “ nature presents us. We conceive only a
 “ single and unique world, in which every
 “ thing is linked together, where each effect is
 “ due to a natural cause, either known or un-
 “ known, and which produces it according to
 “ necessary laws. We affirm nothing that is
 “ not demonstrable, and, which you are oblig-
 “ ed to admit as well as us: the principles
 “ which we lay down are clear and evident,
 “ they are facts; if some things be obscure
 “ and unintelligible to us, we ingenuously
 “ agree to their obscurity, that is to say, to
 “ the limits of our knowledge*. But we
 “ do not imagine an hypothesis in order to

* *Nescire quædam magna pars est sapientiæ.*

“ explain it, we consent to be for ever ignorant
“ of it, or we wait until time, experience, and
“ the progress of human mind, shall throw a
“ light upon it. Is not our manner of philo-
“ sophizing the true one? Indeed in every
“ thing which we advance on the subject of
“ nature, we proceed only in the same man-
“ ner as our adversaries themselves proceed
“ in all the other sciences, such as NATU-
“ RAL HISTORY, NATURAL PHILOSOPHY,
“ MATHEMATICS, CHEMISTRY, MORALITY,
“ POLITICS. We confine ourselves scrupu-
“ lously to that which is known to us through
“ the medium of our senses, the only instru-
“ ments which nature has given us to dis-
“ cover truth. What are our adversaries?
“ In order to explain things which are un-
“ known to them, they imagine beings still
“ more unknown than those things which
“ they are desirous of explaining; beings of
“ whom they themselves acknowledge they
“ have no one notion! They renounce, then,
“ the true principles of LOGIC, which consist
“ in proceeding from that which is most
“ known to that with which we are least ac-
“ quainted. But upon what do they found
“ the

“ the existence of these beings by whose aid
“ they pretend to resolve all difficulties? It
“ is upon the universal ignorance of men,
“ upon their inexperience, upon their ter-
“ rors, upon their disturbed imaginations,
“ upon a pretended *intimate sense*, which is
“ in reality only the effect of ignorance, of
“ fear, of the want of the habit of reflecting
“ for themselves, and the suffering themselves
“ to be guided by authority. Such, O theo-
“ logians! are the ruinous foundations upon
“ which ye build the edifice of your doc-
“ trine. After this, ye find it an impossi-
“ bility to form to yourselves any precise
“ idea of those gods who serve for the basis
“ of your systems, either of their attributes,
“ of their existence, of the nature of their
“ residence, or of their manner of acting.
“ Thus, even by your own confession, ye
“ are in a state of profound ignorance
“ of the primary elements (of which it is
“ indispensibly requisite to have a knowledge)
“ of a thing which ye constitute the cause
“ of all that exists. Thus, under whatever
“ point of view ye are contemplated, it is
“ ye that build systems in the air, and of all
“ systematizers

“ systematizers ye are the most absurd ; be-
“ cause in relying on your imagination to
“ create a cause, this cause ought, at least,
“ to diffuse light over the whole ; it is upon
“ this condition alone, that its incompre-
“ hensibility could be pardoned: but can this
“ cause serve to explain any thing? Does it
“ make us conceive more clearly the origin
“ of the world, the nature of man, the facul-
“ ties of the soul, the source of good and of
“ evil? No, unquestionably, this imaginary
“ cause either explains nothing, multi-
“ plies of itself the difficulties to infinity,
“ or throws embarrassment and obscurity on
“ all those matters in which they have made
“ it interpose. Whatever may be the
“ question that is agitated, it becomes com-
“ plicated as soon as ever they introduce the
“ name of God: this name only presents
“ itself in the clearest sciences accompanied
“ with clouds, which render the most evident
“ notions complex and ænigmatical. What
“ idea of morality doth your divinity pre-
“ sent to man, upon whose will and example
“ you found all the virtues? Do not all your
“ revelations shew him to us under the cha-

“rafter of a tyrant who sports with the hu-
“man species ; who commits evil for the
“pleasure of doing it, who only governs
“the world according to the rules of his
“unjust caprices which you cause us to
“adore? All your ingenious systems, all
“your mysteries, all the subtilities which
“ye have invented, are they capable of
“washing your god, whom ye say is so per-
“fect, from that blackness and atrocity with
“which good sense cannot fail to accuse
“him? In short, is it not in his name that ye
“disturb the universe, that ye persecute, that
“ye exterminate all those who refuse to sub-
“scribe to those systematical reveries which
“ye have decorated with the pompous name
“of religion. AGREE, THEN, O THEOLO-
“GIANS! THAT YE ARE, NOT ONLY SYSTE-
“MATICALLY ABSURD, BUT ALSO THAT YE
“FINISH BY BEING ATTROCIOUS AND CRUEL
“FROM THE IMPORTANCE WHICH YOUR
“PRIDE AND YOUR INTEREST ATTACH TO
“THOSE RUINOUS SYSTEMS, UNDER WHICH
“YE OVERWHELM BOTH HUMAN REASON
“AND THE FELICITY OF NATIONS.”

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

A SUMMARY OF THE CODE OF NATURE.

THAT which is false cannot be useful to men; that which constantly injures them cannot be founded upon truth, and ought to be forever proscribed. It is, then, to serve the human mind, and to labour for the happiness of man, to present him with the clue of thread by which he can extricate himself from the labyrinth in which his imagination wanders, and makes him err without finding any termination to his incertitudes. Nature alone, known by experience, will give him this thread and furnish the means of combating the *Minotaurs*, the phantoms, and the monsters which during so many ages have exacted a cruel tribute from affrighted mortals. By holding this thread in their hands, men will never be led astray; but if for a moment they drop it, they will infallibly fall again

again into their ancient wanderings. In vain shall they carry their views towards heaven to find resources which are at their feet : so long as men, infatuated with their religious opinions, shall seek in an imaginary world the principles of their conduct here below, they will be without principles ; as long as they shall obstinately contemplate the heavens, they will grope upon the earth ; and their uncertain steps will never encounter their welfare, nor lead them to that surety and repose which is necessary to their happiness.

But men, whom their prejudices render obstinate in injuring each other, are armed even against those who are desirous of procuring for them the greatest benefits. Accustomed to be deceived, they are in a state of continual suspicion ; habituated to mistrust themselves, to fear reason, and to look upon truth as dangerous, they treat even those as enemies who are disposed to encourage them : forewarned in early life by imposture, they believe themselves obliged carefully to defend the bandeau with which they cover their eyes, and to wrestle against all those who should attempt to tear it from

them. If their eyes, accustomed to darkness, are opened for a moment, the light wounds them, and they dart with fury upon him who presents them with a flambeau which dazzles them. In consequence, the atheist is looked upon as a malignant being, as a public poison; he who dares awaken mortals from a lethargic sleep into which habit has plunged them, passes for a perturbator; he who should desire to calm their frantic transports, passes, himself, for a madman; he who invites his associates to rend their chains, appears only like an irrational and inconsiderate being, to those captives who believe that nature has formed them for no other purpose than to live in shackles and to tremble. After these fatal prepossessions, the disciple of nature is commonly received by his fellow-citizens, in the same manner as is the doleful bird of night, whom all the other birds, as soon as he quits his retreat, follow with a common hatred and various cries.

No, mortals, blinded by terror! the friend of nature is not your enemy; its interpreter is not the minister of falsehood; the destroyer of your vain phantoms is not
the

the destroyer of those truths necessary to your happiness; the disciple of reason is not an irrational being, who seeks to poison ye, or to infect ye with a dangerous delirium. If he wrests the thunder from the hands of those terrible gods who terrify ye, it is that ye may discontinue your march, in the midst of storms, over a road which you can distinguish only by the faint glimmerings of the lightning. If he breaks those idols perfumed by fear, or imbrued by fanaticism and fury with blood, it is to substitute in their place those consoling truths which are suitable to inspire ye with courage. If he overturns those temples and those altars so frequently bathed with tears, blackened by cruel sacrifices, smoked with servile incense, it is that he may erect to peace, to reason, to virtue, a durable monument, in which at all times ye will find an asylum against your phrensy, your passions, and against those of powerful men, by whom ye are oppressed. If he combats the haughty pretensions of those tyrants deified by superstition, who like your gods, crush ye under an iron sceptre; it is that ye may enjoy the rights of your nature; it is

to the end that ye may be freemen, and not slaves for ever chained to misery ; it is that ye may at length be governed by men and citizens, who may cherish, who may protect men like themselves, and citizens from whom they hold their power. If he attacks imposture, it is to re-establish truth in its rights so long usurped by error. If he destroys the ideal base of that uncertain or fanatical morality, which hitherto has done no more than dazzle your mind without correcting your hearts, it is to give to the science of morals an immoveable basis in your own nature. Dare, then, to listen to his voice ! much more intelligible than those ambiguous oracles, which imposture announces to you in the name of a capricious divinity, who unceasingly contradicts his own will : listen, then, to NATURE, she never contradicts herself.

“ O ye ! ” says she, “ who after the impulsion which I have given you, tend towards happiness in every instant of your existence, do not resist my sovereign law. Labour to your felicity ; enjoy without fear, and be happy ; you will find the means
written

“ written in your heart. Vainly, O supersti-
“ tious being! seekest thou thine happiness
“ beyond the limits of the universe, in which
“ my hand hath placed thee. Vainly shalt
“ thou ask it of those inexorable phantoms
“ which thine imagination would establish
“ upon my eternal throne; vainly dost thou
“ expect it in those cœlestial regions which
“ thy delirium hath created; vainly dost thou
“ reckon upon those capricious deities with
“ whose benevolence thou art in extacies,
“ whilst they only fill thine abode with ca-
“ lamities, with fears, with groans, and with
“ illusions. Dare, then! to enfranchise thyself
“ from this religion, my self-conceited rival,
“ who mistakes my rights; renounce these
“ gods, who are usurpers of my power, and
“ return under the dominion of my laws.
“ It is in my empire that liberty reigns.
“ Tyranny and slavery are banished from it
“ for ever; equity watches over the secu-
“ rity of my subjects, and maintains them
“ in their rights; benevolence and humani-
“ ty connect them by amicable bonds; truth
“ enlightens them; and never can impos-
“ ture blind them with its dark clouds.
“ Return

“ Return, then, my child ; deserter, return
“ to Nature ! she will console thee, she will
“ drive from thine heart those fears which
“ overwhelm thee, those inquietudes that
“ distract thee, those transports which agi-
“ tate thee, those hatreds which separate
“ thee from man, whom thou shouldst love.
“ Return to Nature, to Humanity, to thy-
“ self ; strew flowers over the road of life ;
“ cease to contemplate the future ; live for
“ thyself, live for thy fellow-creatures, de-
“ scend into thine interior ; consider after-
“ wards the sensitive beings that environ
“ thee, and leave those gods who can do
“ nothing for thy felicity. Enjoy and cause
“ to be enjoyed those benefits which I have
“ placed in common for all the children of the
“ earth, who have all emanated equally from
“ my bosom ; assist them to support the sor-
“ rows to which destiny has submitted them
“ as well as thee. I approve thy pleasures
“ when without injuring thyself, they are not
“ fatal to thy brethren, whom I have ren-
“ dered necessary to thine own peculiar hap-
“ piness. These pleasures are permitted thee,
“ if thou usest them in that due proportion
“ which

“ which I myself have fixed. Be, then, happy, O man ! nature invites thee to it, but
“ remember that thou canst not be so alone ;
“ I invite all mortals to happiness as well as
“ thee, it is only in rendering them happy
“ that thou wilt be so thyself ; such is the
“ order of destiny ; if thou attemptest to withdraw
“ thyself from it, remember that hatred,
“ vengeance, and remorse, are always ready
“ to punish the infraction of its irrevocable
“ decrees.

“ Follow then, O man ! in whatever rank
“ thou findest thyself, the plan which is
“ marked out for thee to obtain that happiness
“ to which thou canst pretend. Let
“ the sensations of humanity interest thee
“ for the condition of man, thy fellow-creature ;
“ let thine heart have commiseration
“ for the misfortunes of others ; let thy
“ generous hand be opened to succour the
“ unhappy mortal who is overwhelmed by
“ his destiny ; remember that it may one day
“ overwhelm thee as it now does him : acknowledge,
“ then, that every unfortunate
“ being has a right to thy kindness. Above
“ all, wipe away the tears of oppressed innocence ;

“ cence ; let the tears of virtue in distress
“ be received in thy bosom ; let the gentle
“ heat of sincere friendship warm thine honest
“ heart ; let the esteem of a mate cherished
“ in thy bosom make thee forget the sorrows
“ of life ; be faithful to her tenderness, that
“ she may be faithful to thine, and that under
“ the eyes of parents united and virtuous,
“ thy children may learn virtue ; that after
“ having occupied thy riper years, they may
“ render to the evening of thy life those
“ cares which thou shalt have bestowed
“ on their imbecile infancy.

“ Be just, because equity is the support
“ of the human species ! Be good, because
“ goodness connects all hearts ! Be indul-
“ gent, because feeble thyself, thou livest
“ with beings as feeble as thou art ! Be gen-
“ tle, because gentleness attracts affection !
“ Be grateful, because gratitude feeds and
“ nourishes benevolence ! Be modest, because
“ haughtiness is disgusting to beings smitten
“ with themselves ! Forgive injuries, because
“ revenge perpetuates hatred ! Do good to
“ him who injureth thee, in order to shew
“ thyself more noble than he is, and to make
“ a friend

“ a friend of him! Be reserved, temperate,
“ and chaste, because voluptuousness, in-
“ temperance, and excess, will destroy thy
“ being, and render thee contemptible!

“ Be a citizen, because thy country is
“ necessary to thy security, to thy pleasures,
“ and to thine happiness! Be faithful, and
“ submit to legitimate authority, because
“ it is requisite to the maintenance of that
“ society which is necessary to thyself. Be
“ obedient to the laws, because they are the
“ expression of the public will, to which thy
“ particular will ought to be subordinate!
“ Defend thy country, because it is that
“ which renders thee happy, and contains
“ thy property as well as all those beings
“ who are dearest to thine heart! Do
“ not permit this common parent of thy-
“ self and thy fellow-citizens to fall under
“ the shackles of tyranny, because, from
“ thence, it will be no more than a prison to
“ thee! If thine unjust country refuse thee
“ happiness; if, submitted to an unjust power,
“ it suffers thee to be oppressed, withdraw
“ thyself from it in silence, and never
“ disturb it.

“ In short, be a man ; be a sensible and
“ rational being ; be a faithful husband ; a
“ tender father ; an equitable master ; a
“ zealous citizen ; labour to serve thy coun-
“ try by thy powers ; thy talents, thine
“ industry, and thy virtues ; participate
“ with thine associates, those gifts which
“ nature has bestowed on thee ; diffuse hap-
“ piness, contentment, and joy, over all those
“ who approach thee ; that the sphere of
“ thine actions, enlivened by thy kindness,
“ may re-act upon thyself ; be assured, that
“ the man who makes others happy, cannot
“ be unhappy himself. In conducting thy-
“ self thus, whatever may be the injustice and
“ the blindness of the beings with whom it is
“ thy destiny to live, thou wilt never be
“ totally destitute of the recompenses which
“ are thy due ; no power on earth will be
“ able, at least, to ravish from thee thine in-
“ ward content, that source of the purest
“ felicity ; thou wilt fall back at each mo-
“ ment with pleasure upon thyself ; thou
“ wilt find at the bottom of thine heart,
“ neither shame, terror, nor remorse ; thou
“ wilt love thyself ; thou wilt be great in
thine

“ thine own eyes; thou wilt be cherished,
“ thou wilt be esteemed by all good men,
“ whose suffrages are much more valuable
“ than those of the bewildered multitude.
“ Nevertheless, if thou carriest thy contem-
“ plation to externals, contented coun-
“ tenances will express to thee, tenderness,
“ interest, and feeling. A life, of which
“ each moment shall be marked by the sere-
“ nity of thy soul, and the affection of the
“ beings which environ thee, will conduct
“ thee peaceably to the period of thy days;
“ for thou must die; but thou already sur-
“ vivest thyself in thought; thou shalt always
“ live in the minds of thy friends, and those
“ beings whom thine hands have rendered
“ fortunate; thy virtues have, before-hand,
“ erected to thee imperishable monuments.
“ If heaven occupied itself with thee, it
“ would be satisfied with thy conduct, when
“ it shall have contented the earth.

“ Beware, then, how thou complaineſt of
“ thy condition. Be just, be good, be vir-
“ tuous, and never canst thou be destitute of
“ pleasure. Take heed how thou enviest the
“ deceitful and transient felicity of power-

“ful crime, of victorious tyranny, of inter-
“rested imposture, of venal equity, of har-
“dened opulence. Never be tempted to
“swell the court or to encrease the herd of
“slaves of the unjust tyrant. Never be tempt-
“ed to acquire, by dint of infamy, of extor-
“tions, of outrages, or remorse, the fatal ad-
“vantage of oppressing thy fellow-creatures;
“do not be the mercenary accomplice of
“the oppressors of thy country; they are
“obliged to blush, whenever they meet
“thine eyes.

“For, do not deceive thyself, it is I who
“punish, more surely than the gods, all
“the crimes of the earth; the wicked may
“escape the laws of men, but they never
“escape mine. It is I who have formed
“the hearts and the bodies of mortals; it is
“I who have fixed the laws which govern
“them. If thou deliverest thyself up to infa-
“mous voluptuousness, the companions of
“thy debauchery will applaud thee; but
“I shall punish thee with cruel infirmities,
“which will terminate a life of shame and
“contempt. If thou givest thyself up to
“intemperance, the laws of men will not
“chastise

“ chastise thee ; but I shall punish thee
“ by abridging thy days. If thou art
“ vicious, thy fatal habits will fall on
“ thine own head. Princes, those terrestrial
“ divinities, whose power places them
“ above the laws of men, are obliged to
“ tremble under mine. It is I who chastise
“ them ; it is I who fill them with suspi-
“ cion, terror, and inquietude ; it is I who
“ make them tremble even at the name of
“ august truth ; it is I who, even amongst
“ the multitude of nobles, that surrounds
“ them, make them feel the keen and poi-
“ soned arrows of chagrin and shame. It is
“ I who diffuse *ennui* over their benumbed
“ souls, to punish them for the abuse which
“ they have made of my gifts. It is I who
“ follow uncreated and eternal justice ; it is
“ I who, without exception of persons,
“ know how to proportion the chastisement
“ to the fault—the misery to the deprava-
“ tion. The laws of men are just only when
“ they are conformable to mine ; their judg-
“ ments are rational only when I have dic-
“ tated them ; my laws alone are immut-
“ able, universal, irreformable, and made
“ to

“to regulate, in every place, and in all
“times, the condition of the human race.

“If thou doubtest mine authority, and
“the irresistable power which I have over
“mortals; consider the vengeance which I
“wreak on all those who resist my de-
“crees. Descend into the recesses of
“the hearts of those various criminals,
“whose contented countenances cover
“a torn soul: Dost thou not see the
“ambitious tormented night and day, with
“an ardour which nothing can extinguish?
“Dost thou not behold the conqueror tri-
“umph with remorse, and reign sorrowful-
“ly over smoking ruins, over uncultivated
“and devastated solitudes, over unhappy
“wretches who curse him? Dost thou be-
“lieve that the tyrant, encircled with flat-
“terers, who stun him with their praise, is
“unconscious of the hatred which his op-
“pressions excite, and of the contempt
“which his vices, his inutility, and his de-
“baucheries draw upon him? Dost thou
“think that that haughty courtier does not
“blush at the bottom of his soul for those
“insults

“ insults which he brooks, and those mean-
“ nesses by which he purchases favour?

“ Behold those indolent rich, a prey to
“ the *ennui* and satiety which always follow
“ their exhausted pleasures. View the mi-
“ ser, inaccessible to the cries of misery, groan
“ emaciated over the useless treasure which,
“ at the expence of himself, he has taken
“ the pains to amass. See the voluptuary so
“ gay, the intemperate man so smiling, se-
“ cretly lament the want of that health which
“ they have prodigally thrown away. See
“ disunion and hatred reign between those
“ adulterous married couples. See the liar
“ and the knave deprived of all confidence.
“ See the hypocrite and the impostor fear-
“ fully avoid thy penetrating looks, and trem-
“ ble even at the name of formidable truth.
“ Contemplate the heart of the envious man,
“ uselessly dishonoured, which withers at the
“ welfare of others; the frozen soul of the
“ ungrateful wretch, whom no kindness can
“ warm; the iron heart of that monster,
“ which the sighs of the unfortunate cannot
“ mollify. Behold that revengeful being,
“ who is nourished with gall and serpents,
“ and

“ necessary ; thou shunnest them without
“ hating them, and thou wouldst succour
“ them. If thou comparest thyself with them,
“ thou wilt felicitate thyself, to find that
“ peace ever dwells at the bottom of thine
“ own heart. In short, thou seeest accom-
“ plished upon them, and upon thee, the
“ decrees of destiny, which demand, that
“ CRIME should punish itself, and that VIRTUE
“ should never be destitute of recompense.”

Such is the sum of those truths which are contained in the code of nature ; such are the doctrines which its disciple can announce : they are, unquestionably, preferable to those of that supernatural religion, which never does any thing but mischief to the human species. Such is the worship which is taught by that sacred reason, which is the object of the contempt and the insult of the fanatic, who will estimate that only which man can neither conceive nor practise, who makes his morality consist in fictitious duties, his virtue in actions that are useless and frequently pernicious to society ; who, for want of being acquainted with nature, which he has before his eyes, believes himself obliged

to seek, in an ideal world, imaginary motives, of which every thing proves the inefficacy. The motive which the morality of nature employs, is the evident interest of each man, of each society, of the whole human species, in all times, in every country, and in all circumstances. Its worship is the sacrifice of vice, and the practice of real virtues ; its object is the conservation, the happiness, and the peace of men ; its recompences are affection, esteem, and glory ; or, in their default, contentment of soul, and merited self-esteem, of which nothing will ever be able to deprive virtuous mortals ; its chastisements are hatred, contempt, and the indignation which society always reserves for those who outrage it, and from which the most powerful can never withdraw themselves.

Those nations who shall be disposed to practise a morality so wise, who shall inculcate it in infancy, and whose laws shall unceasingly confirm it, will neither have occasion for superstitions nor for chimeras : those who shall obstinately prefer phantoms to their dearest interests, will certainly walk forward to ruin. If they maintain themselves for a

time, it is because the power of nature sometimes brings them back to reason, in despite of those prejudices which appear to lead them on to certain destruction. Superstition and tyranny, leagued together for the destruction of the human species, are themselves frequently obliged to implore the assistance of a reason which they disdain, of a nature which they debase and crush under the weight of their false divinities. This religion, in all times so fatal to mortals, covers itself with the mantle of public utility, every time that reason is disposed to attack it; it rests its importance and its rights upon the indissoluble alliance which it pretends to subsist between it and morality, against which, however, it never ceases to wage the most cruel war. It is, unquestionably, by this artifice, that it seduces so many sages; they honestly believe superstition to be useful to politics, and necessary to restrain the passions; this hypocritical superstition, in order to mask its hideous character, always knew how to cover itself with the veil of utility, and the shield of virtue; consequently, it has been believed necessary to respect it, and to

favour imposture, because it has entrenched itself behind the altars of truth. It is from this entrenchment that we ought to drag it forth in order to convince it, in the eyes of the human species, of its crimes and of its follies; to tear from it the seducing mask with which it is covered; to shew the universe its sacriligious hands armed with homicidal poniards, stained with the blood of nations, whom it intoxicates with its fury, or whom it immolates without pity to its inhuman passions.

The morality of nature is the only religion which the interpreter of nature-offers to his fellow-citizens, to nations, to the human species, to future races, weaned from those prejudices which have so frequently disturbed the felicity of their ancestors. The friend of mankind cannot be the friend of the gods, who were in all times the real scourges of the earth. The apostle of nature will not be the instrument of deceitful chimeras, who make this world only an abode of illusions; the adorer of truth will not compromise with falsehood, he will make no covenant with error, of which the consequence

quence will never be other than fatal to mortals; he knows that the happiness of the human species exacts, that the dark and unsteady edifice of superstition should be destroyed from top to bottom, in order to elevate to nature, to peace, to virtue, the temple which is suitable to them. He knows, that it is only by extirpating, even to the very roots, the poisonous tree, which, during so many ages, has overshadowed the universe, that the eyes of the inhabitants of this world will be able to perceive that light which is suitable to illumine them, to guide them, and to warm their souls. If his efforts are vain, if he cannot inspire with courage those beings, too much accustomed to tremble, he will applaud himself for having dared to make the attempt. Nevertheless, he will not judge his efforts useless, if he has been able to make only one mortal happy; if his principles have calmed the transports of one honest soul; if his reasonings have cheered up some virtuous hearts. He will, at least, have the advantage of having banished from his mind the importunate terrors of the superstitious; of having driven from his heart the gall which exasperates zeal; of having trodden
under

under his feet those chimeras with which the uninformed are tormented. Thus escaped from the tempest, he will contemplate, from the summit of his rock, those storms which the gods excite upon the earth ; he will hold forth a succouring hand to those who shall be willing to accept it. He will encourage them with his voice, he will second them with his prayers, and in the warmth of his compassionate heart, he will exclaim:

O NATURE ! sovereign of all beings ! and ye its adorable daughters, VIRTUE, REASON, and TRUTH ! remain for ever our only divinities ; it is to you that belong the praises and the homage of the earth. Shew us, then, O NATURE ! that which man ought to do, in order to obtain the happiness which thou makest him desire. VIRTUE ! animate him with thy beneficent fire. REASON ! conduct his uncertain steps through the road of life. TRUTH ! let thy flambeau illumine him. Unite, O assisting deities ! your powers, in order to submit the hearts of men to your dominion. Banish from our mind, error, wickedness, and confusion ; and cause knowledge,

ledge, goodness, and serenity, to reign in their stead. Let imposture, confounded, never dare to shew itself. Fix our eyes, so long dazzled or blindfolded, at length upon those objects which we ought to seek. Dispel for ever, those hideous phantoms, and those seducing chimeras which only serve to lead us astray. Draw us from those abysses into which superstition plunges us; overthrow the fatal empire of delusion and falsehood; wrest from them the power they have usurped over you. Command, without sharing it with mortals; break the chains which overwhelm them; tear the veil that covers them; allay that fury which intoxicates them; break in the bloody hands of tyranny that sceptre with which it crushes them; exile for ever to the imaginary regions from whence fear has brought them forth, those gods who afflict them. Inspire the intelligent being with courage; give him energy, that, at length, he may dare to love himself, esteem himself, and feel his dignity; that he may dare enfranchise himself; that he may be happy and free; that he may never be a slave to any but your laws; that he may
perfection

perfection his condition; that he may cherish his fellow-creatures; that he may himself enjoy, and that he may also cause others to enjoy. Console the child of nature for those sorrows which destiny obliges him to undergo, by those pleasures of which wisdom permits him to taste; teach him to submit to necessity; conduct him without alarm to the period of all beings; and instruct him, that HE IS MADE NEITHER TO AVOID IT NOR TO FEAR IT.

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